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Lessons of life and
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LESSONS
OF LIFE AND GODLINESS.



LESSONS OF LIFE AND GODLINESS:

A SELECTION OF

S E R M O N S

PREACHED IN

The Parish Church of Doncaster.

BY

C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

MASTER OF THE TEMPLE.

FOURTH EDITION.

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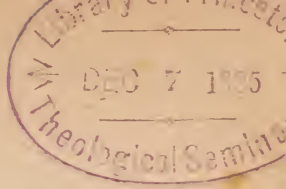
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LESSONS OF LIFE AND GODLINESS.

SERMON I.

THE TALEBEARER.

PROVERBS XI. 13.

A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

By thy words, our Lord said, thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. I need not add anything more to excuse my calling your attention this morning to the verse just read to you, taken as it is from one of the Lessons selected for the Service for this day.

There is a prejudice in men's minds against what are called moral Sermons. And no doubt there may be a moral Sermon which is unchristian, Christless, and therefore miserable food for a Christian congregation. But it need not be so. I have heard Sermons on single points of duty, which I could never afterwards forget; Sermons for which I shall be grateful to my dying day.

And I would desire, my brethren, as one very high object of my own ministry among you, to speak to you now and then upon special particulars of Christian conduct; praying God to make such Sermons not the least but the most stirring of all that are delivered to you; fruitful in humility, fruitful in vigilance, fruitful in self-knowledge, and fruitful in charity.

The Book of Proverbs, which is just now furnishing us with our Sunday Lessons, is a portion of Holy Scripture abundant in wise precepts. It is a miscellaneous collection of sagacious remarks, by one who knew the human heart well, and had had much experience of human life in its brighter and in its darker phases, and who unhappily had had in his own history but too many warnings as to the power of temptation and the miserable consequences of sin. The knowledge which we possess of the personal life of king Solomon, of his early piety, his singular endowments, his magnificent beginning and his melancholy ending, adds greatly to the interest of his writings. And yet, if we had known nothing whatever of him but his writings, we could scarcely have failed to regard him as one of the wisest and one of the most remarkable of men. What lessons does this Book contain for young men and young women; for persons whose course lies fresh and open before them, and who have still to form their principles and to point their aim in life! What solemn, what touching appeals to them as to refusing the evil and choosing the good! What earnest exhortations to think of the end from the beginning, and so to take heed to their ways at the first, that they may have peace and hope at the last! And then

what lessons for men of mature life! What a storehouse of wisdom and prudence for the man of business! What grave admonitions as to the necessity of uprightness; that one chief virtue of the tradesman, and the merchant, and the agent or manager for others! Those oft-repeated, and in their sound almost obsolete, maxims about the false weight and measure—alas! is there no room for that precept in the world of this day? *The bag of deceitful weights* which we heard of, a few Sundays ago, in the prophet Micah, does that need much translating, or much adaptation, in order to make it suitable to the circumstances of some of those who hear me? Is the trickery of trade, its short measure and its light weight, a thing altogether of a past century?

But now let me come closely to my chosen subject. The talebearer revealing secrets, and the faithful man concealing matters. I dare say we have all heard this verse read many times, and thought but little of it. May God give us an ear to hear it to-day inwardly!

A talebearer. One celebrated nation of antiquity used to express this man's character by a very significant figure. They called a tale-bearer a "seed-picker." They gave him the same name which they used for a bird which goes about everywhere picking up seeds. The poor bird does it for its own support and for that of its young. I wish we could say as much for the talebearer. And yet it is no exaggeration to say that there are men in the world who live by their seed-collecting; by going about here and there, from house to house, from street to street, through a town large or small, and gathering together all the little stories which can be told or made

about the neighbours who are (as last Sunday's Lesson expressed it) *dwelling* all the time *securely by them*, and ignorant of the calumnies by which they are assailed.

Yes, the "seed-collector," the man who goes about gathering anecdotes, great and small, about his neighbours, and retailing them again as he goes, is a common character everywhere. I wish that I could hold up the mirror to him for his own conviction. I am sure he would be ashamed, I believe he would be sorry, if he saw himself faithfully pourtrayed. If we endeavour to do so, it is for his good, with a view to making him a better man, with a view to showing him a more excellent way, with a view to bringing him to the cross for forgiveness, and to the Spirit of Christ for cleansing. It may be that the giving up of one fault will be in God's hand the very saving of his soul.

A talebearer revealeth secrets. Things which have been confided to him, too often: things which a misplaced trust has put into his possession: things which a conscience ill at ease has deposited with him for its own relief: these things are sometimes betrayed by those who should have known better. Or else things which ought to be secrets: things which, even if true, are better not repeated: things the repetition of which can do no good either to religion or morality: things which it is a shame even to speak of, and which are only done, if done at all, in secret. Or else things which really are secrets; secrets even to the person who repeats them, inasmuch as they are mere guesses, chance shots, arrows winged at a venture, assertions founded on a mere suspicion, suspicions founded on a mere imagination. Yes, all

these are examples of what we may understand by "secrets" here. These are the things which are every day in every place being revealed: if true, a veil which was but decent is being rudely stripped off from them: if half true, if based only on truth, if mixed with but a grain of truth, if a mere fabrication, still worse is it then: the "revealing" is then, in part or in whole, an inventing: and heavy is the responsibility, great the criminality, of him who so reveals secrets as to create what he discloses. Hence strifes and divisions among you: hence bitter heartburnings: hence deep resentments: hence misery in families: hence discords and separations between chief friends: hence blasted characters and blighted lives. Yet the talebearer sees not the ruin: he has borne but a small part in it ostensibly: he only picked up his seed, and dropped it again; *it* found its congenial soil; it sprang and grew up he knew not how!

What a mischievous habit! you all exclaim. And yet, my brethren, the tendency is in all of us. Many motives go to make up a talebearer. His character is not so odious, apparently, in its beginnings. Perhaps he is a witty man. He has what is called a turn for satire. His insinuations have much point in them. He can intimate, rather than express, a scandal. His representations of character are pungent. His imitations, his caricatures, of manner and of speech, are irresistibly comic. In society he is the life of his company. You scarcely think, and he scarcely thinks, of the effect he is producing upon the good name of others. It is not till he is silent and departed—perhaps not even then—that you begin to feel that there has been virtually a

talebearer among you, and that he has been revealing unkind secrets.

Or, again, he may be a man in whose own conscience there is a sore place. He knows something against himself. He is conscious of some lurking, some secret, some bosom sin. And it is a relief to him to hope that others are not so much better than himself. He finds a solace in his wretchedness in making company for his sin. None are so bitter in their taunts, none are so credulous in their suspicions, as those unhappy people who are on the look-out for society in their degradation. To believe that others are even as they, to throw out the hint that they have reason to think evil, is a momentary palliation of the sting of an accusing conscience.

And there are others who cannot bear superiors. They do not like superiors in station: but superiors in character they cannot brook. To hear another praised is to hear themselves blamed. Everything which is ascribed to another is felt as though taken from themselves. Up to their own level, they can bear to see another lifted: but, above that, it is pain and grief to them. Their only comfort is in a general disbelief of virtue. A ridiculous story to tell of the eminently good is to them as a draught of water to the thirsty. If no one else is quite so good, we ourselves may perhaps not be quite so bad.

Sometimes it goes yet beyond this. A story is told—and I have seen it applied in this very sense—of a tribe of savages who believe that the strength of a slain enemy passes into his conqueror. Every man who kills his foe is not only ridding himself of a danger, but also

possessing himself of a virtue. The speed, or the sagacity, or the courage, or the unerring aim of the dead man, all becomes instantly the property and the endowment of the victor. Is it not sometimes thus with our depreciations one of another? Is it not with us, sometimes, not only the taking down of that which towers above us, but also the elevation of ourselves upon its ruins? A man is often seen to be as eager in running down the merit of another, his goodness or ability, his uprightness, or his wisdom, or his kindness, or his devotion, as if he thought, like the wild Indian of whom we have spoken, that the denial of this or that virtue to another would be its ascription to himself.

Thus it is that the talebearer is formed. These, and many more, are among the motives which impel him to his mission. He goes on his way revealing secrets. He calls it himself by a very different name. Agreeable conversation, a quick sense of the ridiculous, a ready humour, a good-natured pleasantry, innocent and certainly not uncharitable mirth—it is thus that he denominates that which Solomon calls by the far less honourable name of talebearing, that which one greater than Solomon terms a tissue of idle words to be given account of in the day of judgment.

My brethren, do not imagine that he who is addressing you is able to look down from a high eminence upon the follies or the sins of others. He is seeking rather to impress his own mind as well as yours with the importance of the warning on which we meditate together. And as we have been compelled to dwell for a time on the dark side of the picture, so now let us turn it in our

hand and view that which is brighter and more attractive: as we have sought to express to ourselves the character of the talebearer who revealeth secrets, so now let us think for a few moments of his opposite: *he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.*

The matter. He does not say what matter. But we may understand it to include two things: that which has been entrusted to him in the secrecy of confidence, and that which has become known to him to another's disparagement.

We all think ill, or at least slightly, of one who cannot keep a secret. There are such persons. There are those whom the possession of a secret frets and irritates beyond endurance. They can only relieve themselves by telling it. Such persons do much mischief. They do mischief sometimes by what they actually divulge. It is hard upon those who have trusted them, that they should be betrayed. Perhaps it is their fault for making a bad choice of their confidant. But the mischief goes further. It shakes men's confidence in confidence. People are afraid to trust any one. It has become so much a matter of experience that confidences are betrayed, that we are obliged to keep to ourselves secrets which it would be not only a great relief but a great blessing to us to be able to confide to another. There are ways, we all know, of violating confidence without actual treachery. Sometimes we hint a secret which we do not tell out. Sometimes we take just one other person into our confidence; tell him our friend's secret; and can we wonder if he in his turn tells it to just one other? We ought, for the sake of the general

good, as well as for the sake of guarding against individual injury, to practise ourselves in keeping secrets. *He that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.* We may dislike, we may discourage, as a general rule we may refuse, confidences: happy is he who is the depository of none: but, if a confidence is accepted, if it is even forced upon us, then let it be sacred. Nothing can excuse its violation. Difficult as it may sometimes be to reconcile it with speaking truth, to guard our brother's secret without sullyng our own conscience with falsehood, this is just one of the many difficulties of life—this adjustment of apparently conflicting duties to our neighbour and to God—and we must pray for His help in surmounting it. *He that is of a faithful spirit concealeth* certainly *the matter* which has been entrusted to him.

This may sometimes be, as we have seen, a difficult thing to do: difficult, in the only sense in which a Christian may use that word; namely, when the demands of conscience are ambiguous; when two things, each by itself, are right, and when to combine the two is a matter of perplexity. But to fulfil the charge in its second sense ought not to be very difficult; namely, to conceal the matter which has come to our knowledge in disparagement of another. It sometimes happens to a man to be unable to resist the conviction that another person has done wrong, has committed a particular sin or been guilty of some flagrant inconsistency of life. We all know what the talebearer does on such an occasion; an occasion which ought to be felt so painfully. He has picked up his seed, and he cannot rest till he has dropped it into some new soil. Whatever he may profess, or

however he may flatter himself, the possession of this knowledge is to him not altogether painful. Whereas *charity rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth*; is glad, not when another has sinned, but when another has either risen or stood upright; he, on the contrary, finds in every fall of another a rising of his own, and cannot rest till he has made his own knowledge the common property of his neighbourhood. I am not speaking here of those who, being set in places of public trust, make themselves *partakers of other men's sins* by the very fact of hiding them: there are cases in which discovery and even punishment are duties, and in which he who screens the sinner sins himself. But I am speaking of private life; of disclosures of fault or sin made, not reluctantly, for the purpose of cleansing away sin, but voluntarily, for the sake of divulging it to those whom it does not officially or practically concern. Of such disclosures, I say that they belong to the talebearer and not to the man of a faithful spirit. In such cases, he that is of a faithful spirit will conceal the matter. He will purpose, he will resolve, he will watch and pray, to do so. If he finds himself on the point of telling that which would be to another's injury, he will check himself by a strong effort of will and of duty ere the sentence has crossed the door of his lips. He will gather strength, in doing so, to do so again. He will form the habit of *keeping his tongue as it were with a bridle* while they are present to whom his words would do injury by encouraging the present to despise or to condemn the absent.

My brethren, I cannot close my Sermon without expressing to you with all my power my sense of the im-

portance of the subject. If we could only part for ever with the disposition of the talebearer, we should have parted with that which, more than anything else, confuses and perplexes and embitters human life. How peaceable should we be, if there were no talebearers amongst us; but, let me rather say—for it is the more profitable and the more Christian way of expressing it—if there were not within each of our hearts so much of the spirit of the talebearer! It is the crying sin of social life. We cannot meet for half an hour's friendly converse without taking away one or two characters. Of us, in reference to speech at least, the words of the wise man are too true, *They sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.* God give us all a better wisdom! Let us store our minds with things valuable, and meet one another to give out what we have first taken in. Let us talk less of persons. Constituted as fallen nature is, if we speak of persons, we shall be sure to speak ill of persons. If we must talk so much of persons, let us practise ourselves in speaking well of them. Let us see their good side when we can: and, when we cannot but see the evil, then let us go on our way and be silent about it. Above all—for here lies the root of almost every Christian grace—let us know ourselves a little better. Let us enter into judgment with our own hearts, and compare our own lives, outward and inward, with the standard of God's will and of Christ's example. I believe that, if we did this more, we should have little heart for scandal or for slander. We should be stopped, as by an audible voice within, when we were opening our lips to censure or to malign. It is

the want of self-knowledge which makes us so keensighted. It is the want of acquaintance with Christ, as our Propitiation first, and then as our Example, which makes it possible for us to sit in the tribunal of judgment. O let us think what we are; let us call to remembrance our own sins, our own foolish, perverse, wilful, presumptuous sins, our own ingratitude to Christ, our own rebellion against God, our own hairbreadth escapes and our own shameful falls—O let us think what Christ is to us and has been; how gentle, how patient, how longsuffering, how forgiving, how slow to punish, how swift to bless—and well do I know that we shall have no heart left for triumphing over another, no pleasure in hearing of another's defeat, no sense of self-satisfaction in looking upon another's sin.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,
November 11, 1860.

SERMON II.

THE INNOCENTS' DAY.

PSALM VIII. 2.

Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of Thine enemies, that Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

THE special observance of the Innocents' Day in our Parish Church dates from the year 1675, when a small bequest was left, by the will of a resident in this Town, to secure its perpetual remembrance by an annual Sermon. I know not what particular circumstance may have led to the selection of this day from among so many preceding or following it, which might have seemed to possess a stronger claim to notice. It may have been—though I know not that it was the case—that some family event, the early loss of a child or grandchild, awakening a peculiar interest in the thought of the death of infants, guided the pious founder to the choice of the day on which we are assembled. At all events, for a period of almost two whole centuries, that will has been in force, and it has been the duty of those who have preceded me in this sacred office, as it has now become my

duty, to use the festival commemorative of the massacre of the young children of Bethlehem as an opportunity of instruction and exhortation to so many of the people of this place as the call of local custom shall have succeeded in drawing together to hear and to worship. I have hoped that the selection for the first time of an evening instead of a morning hour, may enable a somewhat larger body of worshippers to avail themselves of this opportunity of edification.

All must have been struck, some perhaps perplexed, by the choice and arrangement of those Church festivals which follow immediately upon Christmas Day. There is no very obvious connexion between Christmas day and the martyrdom of St Stephen; between the martyrdom of St Stephen and the life (protracted to extreme old age and to a peaceful end) of the great Apostle and Evangelist St John; between the commemoration of St John the Evangelist and the record of the cruel and untimely fate of the young children slain for Christ's sake at Bethlehem by the bloodthirsty king Herod. Various reasons have been discovered for this arrangement. Some have seen in the three days of which this is the last, the commemoration of three kinds of martyrdom; St Stephen's, a martyrdom both in will and deed; St John's, a martyrdom in will but not in deed; that of the Innocents, a martyrdom in deed not in will. They have seen in close attendance upon the feast of the Nativity the names of those who in different senses gave their very lives for Him who was then manifested in the flesh; those who may be conceived of as standing very near His throne in heaven, one for his martyrdom, another

for his love, the third for their innocence; constituting in a manner the very first fruits of that work of redemption which the festival of Christmas presents to us in its marvellous origin and in its most comprehensive aspect.

There is perhaps something of fancy in all this. Perhaps we need not search very deeply for reasons why these three festivals, and not three others, or four or five others, should follow so closely in the wake of Christmas. Accident may have had its share in it, as well as design; more especially as, I believe, there was a difference of date in the institution of the three festivals; St John's Day having been consecrated at a later time than St Stephen's, and the Innocents' Day having been originally associated, not with Christmas, but with the Epiphany. Reasons may be found for many things afterwards, which had no share in causing them.

Our business now is with one only of these three days; that which commemorates the fact recorded in the second Chapter of St Matthew's Gospel; namely, that, when king Herod found that the wise men who had come from the East, under the guidance of the Star, to enquire for the birthplace of the infant King of the Jews, had departed into their own country another way, instead of exposing themselves, and the young child also, to the risks of his rage and malice, he sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, that he might be quite sure to include amongst them Him whose rising power he ignorantly feared. A cruel and shameful, as well as impotent, endeavour: but what was there here, we might ask, which could either entitle these little chil-

dren to a place in a Calendar of Christian saints, or furnish us with any spiritual lesson, beyond, indeed, that new proof which is here afforded of the folly as well as wickedness of presuming to fight against God? Jesus was already by God's providence withdrawn into Egypt, when the terrible decree went forth for that indiscriminate and barbarous slaughter.

We must look for our answer to these questions to the Services appointed for the day. In particular, we shall turn to the Collect for the day; in which we shall find (as the name itself perhaps implies) the doctrine and principal instruction of the occasion *collected* into a brief and comprehensive form, and made 'the subject of direct prayer to God through His Son Jesus Christ.

The older form of the Collect for the Innocents' Day was to this effect :

O God, whose praise this day the young innocents Thy witnesses have confessed and showed forth, not in speaking, but in dying: mortify and kill all vices in us, that in our conversation (conduct) our life may express Thy faith, which with our tongues we do confess; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

At the last Revision of our Liturgy, in the year 1661, the Collect assumed its present form :

O Almighty God, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast ordained strength—quoting from the 8th Psalm the verse read as the text—and madest infants to glorify Thee by their deaths; didst by Thy permitting and overruling Providence bring it to pass that even little children should give their lives unconsciously in

behalf of Thy Son, satisfying that fury of the oppressor which would else have sought far and wide for its intended victim, and giving him to imagine that in that slaughter of the innocent he had actually cut off Him whose life he sought; *mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by Thy grace, that by the innocency of our lives, and constancy of our faith even unto death, we may glorify Thy holy name, that is, may show forth what Thou art, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

My brethren, the Innocents' Day is practically the commemoration of departed children. It is the festival which we keep in remembrance of all who have died in infancy; taking as their sample and firstfruits the martyred children of Bethlehem. It is the festival on which we recount God's teaching by children; showing forth what we know, from Scripture and from experience, of their possible effects, by word and act and suffering, upon the hearts of men; treasuring up the memory of all those who have safely died in the arms of Christ's redeeming love even before they knew or could understand it; asserting the same hope which the Church entertains and expresses concerning them, that *children who are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved*; and, for ourselves, deeply pondering the lessons which the thought of them ought to teach us, that we, following their example in the points in which it is so distinctly instructive, may inherit the blessing of Him who said, *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* The young children of Bethlehem were a type of redeemed children in every age of the

Church ; and of the whole body and Church of redeemed children as it now is, or hereafter shall be, safely housed in heaven.

This then is a festival which recommends itself very strongly to what I may almost call our Christian instincts, and which ought to be especially dear to all those Christian parents who are either now fostering the infancy of their little ones, or have already laid it to rest in Jesus in the sure and certain hope of a future glorious resurrection.

Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength because of Thine enemies, that Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. Thus wrote the inspired Psalmist in days before the Gospel ; and One greater than he quoted the passage, on an occasion towards the close of His earthly life, described by St Matthew in these words : *And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David ! they were sore displeased, and said unto Him, Hearest thou what these say ? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea ; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise ?* The love of Jesus for little children was indeed, as we all know, strongly marked during His ministry. It is not without reason that the stress of Scripture proof with reference to the Baptism of Infants is thrown by our Prayer Book upon that most elementary yet most significant of all intimations, His receiving the little children that were brought to Him, taking them up in His arms, putting His hands upon them, and blessing

them. He who once did this, and who also took a little child as the one specimen of those who shall be greatest in His kingdom, may well be trusted, now that He is gone away from us, with the spiritual and eternal charge of those little ones who are dedicated to Him in His own ordinance of Baptism; yes, and with the charge also of those little ones who have early passed from a world of sin and sorrow into the dwelling-place of peace and love.

In proportion as we more learn of little children, we rise higher, our Lord Himself teaches us, in the scale of His heavenly kingdom. What then are some of the ways in which we should learn of them? In what respects do they teach a lesson of Christian wisdom to older men?

1. The Collect for this day shall be heard first, in answer to this question. It says that little children teach us a lesson of innocence. *Mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by Thy grace, that by the innocency of our lives, &c.* And so the Baptismal Service, commenting upon the passage already referred to, reminds us how Christ *exhorteth all men to follow their innocency*. We need not shrink from the expression. Innocence, freedom from hurting, from harming, from wrong-doing, is the blessed attribute, even since the Fall, of little children. They inherit a fallen and corrupt nature; but Christ has taken away the guilt of it by His redemption, and they cannot yet choose the evil, or act the evil, for themselves. They are in a happy pause, a blessed interval, could it but continue; washed from original sin, and not yet involved in actual sin; cleansed once, and not

yet defiled; safe from the old Adam in the new, and not yet, of their own freewill, going back from the freedom of the latter into the bondage of the former. Who that has grown up even to boyhood, much more to middle or advanced age, may not well envy, may not earnestly pray to recover, the innocence of the little child? True, there is a higher state than innocence; that of a tried and disciplined godliness: innocence regained is a more glorious attainment than innocence not lost; the position of the young man in Christ, who has overcome the wicked one, than the position of the babe in years, who has never yet been called to encounter him. But innocence not yet lost is a better state than sin, than committed transgression, than forfeited integrity, than stained and sullied purity. If you would shame a young man walking in the way of his own heart in the indulgence of vanity and lust, bring him face to face with a little child: let him look on that clear eye, on that open brow; let him listen to that simple prattling tongue; and, depend upon it, if he be not utterly hardened, there will stir within him, unavowed but not unfelt, the breathing of regret and sorrow, if not of godly repentance, as he looks on this picture and on that; here on the spectacle of what he is, and there on the spectacle of what he was. It is something to be taught, however late, the lesson of innocence; the desire to regain if it were but the vestige of that state in which no wrong has yet been done to the soul or the body of another, no affront consciously offered to the holiness of God, to the blood of Christ, to the grace of the Spirit.

2. There is another lesson never so taught as by a

child; the lesson of simplicity. In a very little child there is no guile, no artifice, no affectation, no self-consciousness. What he is, he seems: what he seems, he is. His real wishes are those which he expresses. He does not say one thing and mean another. He does not seek to gain unavowed ends by crooked and circuitous means. His wants are few, and what he wants he cries out for. Simplicity is in many cases the first thing *lost* by a child; before purity, before innocence. Self-consciousness soon comes in, in some natures, and spoils the whole beauty of the first creation. But this only marks simplicity yet more strongly as the peculiar possession of the little child. Some retain it long, others lose it early; some regain it afterwards, some part with it for ever: but, none the less, in every case, simplicity is the virtue of the very young child.

Simplicity! What a grace! How beautiful, how attractive—yet ceasing to attract the very moment that it desires it! O how far are most of us gone from it! The poor sometimes, to our eye, show it wonderfully: but it is not so with all even of them: they too have their guile, though it is not the same precisely, in its workings, with our own: they too have oftentimes things which they feign, and things which they dissemble: they too have oftentimes unavowed objects to gain, and they seek those objects by crooked means. But in other stations of life how rare, how extremely rare, is a perfect candour, a true simplicity; not degenerating, as we sometimes see it, into rudeness, into harshness, into fault-finding, into disregard of feelings, but kind and gentle

as its Author, sincere in every profession, and straightforward in every act and purpose!

3. There is yet another lesson taught us by the little child; and that is a lesson of trust. Our Lord tells us that God has hidden His truth from the wise and prudent, and has revealed it unto babes; to those, that is, who are like little children in this respect, that they receive with affiance and faith that which one older and wiser than themselves communicates. A little child is no arguer, no caviller: it has an instinctive reliance upon the truth and love of its parents, and never suspects that they would mislead, deceive, or betray. It is a cruel mockery to tell a young child that which is deceptive. It is painful and shocking to see the faith, the credulity if you will, of a child, trifled with. That first dawning suspicion in a child's mind of the truthfulness of an informant, who has gravely asserted something which he does not intend to be accepted as a fact, is no pleasing spectacle to a right-minded observer, though it is but the commencement of an experience which that child must afterwards complete painfully amidst the thousand lies and deceits of the world into which, if he lives, he must enter.

It was said of simplicity that it is that virtue which a child oftentimes first loses: we may say of trust, of credulity, that it is generally the longest kept, the last forfeited. It is not indeed till a little later than the age of infancy that it can be said, in this form, to be brought into exercise. The little child—like those of Bethlehem—*of two years old and under*, has little receptive faith to

practise. Still it is in him a quality, if not exercised, only dormant: it is there—in him above all—only waiting for the touch which is to awaken it.

And is not this a quality which we all greatly need to learn from him? this simple trust in One wiser and better than ourselves? Is not this the history of all error in Christian doctrine, that we have parted with the character of little children; have set up for ourselves as wise and prudent, and therefore must see to ourselves altogether, apart from Him who is our Wisdom as well as our Righteousness?

4. I will add one other quality of the little child; and it is closely connected with the last-named: the quality of submission. The last was submission of the mind; this is submission of the will. The Collect prays, *that, by the constancy of our faith even unto death, we may glorify Thy Holy Name.* It regards the little children of Bethlehem as examples, though involuntary and unconscious examples, of this sort of submission. God's Providence, overruling a cruel decree, accepted, as it were, the sacrifice of those young lives as glorifying Him in His Son Jesus Christ.

And is not this sort of submission one of the special characteristics of the little child? He is in the hands of one who was the instrument of his very being. He lies passive in those hands. Food or medicine, rest or exercise—nay, God's own ordinances of day and night, cold and heat, summer and winter—are all ministered to him through another, and to resist the appointments of that other would be for him not unreasonable only but impossible. The little children

of Bethlehem were obliged to give their young lives to the executioner: the power of resistance is the endowment of a later age: they are at another's mercy, and whithersoever he will he may carry them.

My brethren, our prayer is, that, what a little child is in the hands of its parents—what those little children were in the hands of an absolute king—that we may learn to be in the hands of God. *Even unto death*: that is the limit of our submission. He who gives his life gives all. In God's hands: yes, that is our proper place: and, let me add, that is our place of safety, and that is our place of happiness, and that is our place of dignity. To be in God's hands absolutely, is the glory of God's creatures. Christ came to bring us back into those hands; no longer as the hands of a ruler only, but as the hands of a parent too; of One who gave us being, and who desires only our good. What He gives, we will receive: what He denies, we will forego: what He takes away, we will part with. While He bids, we will stay here: when He bids, we will go hence. Ours shall be the mind, ours the life, of the little child, who subjects himself in all things to another and a wiser will, and out of whose mouth, in the language of a perfectly resigned and submissive heart, God evermore ordains strength and perfects praise. Thus it is that He stills the enemy and the avenger. By the faith of his little children, He puts to silence the ignorance and the hostility of foolish men. Men marvel at them, and, in spite of themselves, sometimes enquire the secret of their constancy. Then they hear that it is because Christ lives that they

live also. Then they understand the meaning of the inspired words, *Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed: always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.* His strength is made perfect in their weakness: insomuch that the words are daily verified, *When I am weak, then am I strong.*

THE INNOCENTS' DAY,
Friday, December 28, 1860.

SERMON III.

THE DISREGARDED AND THE ACCEPTED OFFERING.

GENESIS IV. 4, 5.

*And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering:
but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect.*

THERE are two things which distinguish the Bible from every other book; even from some of those books which profess to derive their teaching from the Bible. Two things, which, when all the arguments which infidelity can bring against the Bible have been exhausted, will still stand their ground, vindicating for it everything which is really included in the term Inspiration, and making it in its completeness—the Old Testament and the New Testament together—the great storehouse for ever of human wisdom and of human hope. These two things are—if only two must be spoken of—the view given us in the Bible of man, and the view given us in the Bible of God. The one so human, the other so Divine. The one so exactly consistent with what we ourselves see of man, the other so exactly consistent with what we ourselves should expect in God; in other words, with what our own conscience, which is God's

voice within, recognizes as worthy of God, and ratifies where it could not have originated.

The explanation and enforcement of this general remark might of itself fill my Sermon. But for to-day it must suffice to ask you to apply the remark itself to the brief and familiar narrative from which the text is taken.

With what rapid strides does the history of the world advance through these first chapters of the Book of Genesis! What a wisdom shines in the brevity! What an indication of the purpose with which God sends His Word; not to gratify curiosity; not to anticipate and not to stifle science; not to supersede human labour and not to indulge human speculation; but simply to instruct man in the things which he could not find out for certain without God; just to give the great leading strokes which it needs a master hand to put in, and then to leave him to fill them up, for himself, yet under their sure direction, with the lesser lines of reflection, of inference, of application, and of experience! The Creation, and then the Fall, and then the reign of sin unto death—these are the real primeval records, and they have their confirmation in everything that we see around us and in everything that we feel within.

We might have thought that, if sin did enter, it would enter by slow degrees. We might have expected that, for some few generations at least, there might have been a lurking alienation of heart from God, a growing reluctance or indifference to worship, and a diminution of natural kindness on the part of men one towards another, without any violent or fatal outbreak of the very

worst passions of a tainted and corrupted nature. But no: the first paragraph which follows the history of the Fall is the history of a murder, the murder of a brother by his own mother's son. Surely this is instructive: it tells us how man's only safeguard—literally his only safeguard—is in God: it tells us how near we are to the very worst crimes: it tells us how acts, of which, on their first hearing, we should exclaim, *Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?* may yet, under altered circumstances, be not only possible to us but easy; meditated and done and even slept upon; thought of afterwards, not only without true repentance, but even without remorse and horror. I repeat it, there is no safety for any one of us but in God; in His constant upholding, sought of Him by constant prayer. There may be some young man, or some child, in this congregation, little aware of the career opening before him, little aware how soon the relaxation of Christian habits may be followed in his case by sin and shame, by crime and punishment; little aware how short is the step from quitting God's presence into openly defying Him, from losing the light of love within to trampling upon it in some fearful deed without. Let us run back into our one refuge, if we have quitted it; the refuge of God's fatherly hand, of Christ's patient love, of the Holy Spirit's quickening and protecting grace.

And now we will approach somewhat more closely to the historical fact before us, and seek by God's blessing to draw from the text one or two thoughts suitable and profitable to ourselves.

The Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering:

but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect. Whence this distinction? Each of these worshippers brought an offering suitable to his occupation. Cain was a tiller of the ground: it was of the fruit of the ground that he brought his oblation. Abel was a keeper of sheep: and he brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. Was there anything in the material of the two offerings, which made the one acceptable and the other offensive? Have we any right to say this, apart from the express language of Scripture? any right to say, as some have said, that by bringing an animal in sacrifice Abel showed a clear perception of the true way of atonement, and that by bringing of the fruits of the earth Cain proved himself a self-justifier, a despiser of propitiation—proved himself, as some one has strongly expressed it, *the first Deist*? I think that in all this we are somewhat in danger of adding presumptuously to the record of Scripture. We are nowhere told that worship by sacrifice was a primeval ordinance of God. If God enjoined it upon our first parents; if He even intimated to them (as some have imagined) by the *coats of skins* with which He clothed them, that the sacrifice of animal victims was the acceptable mode of approaching Him; then indeed the offering of Abel was in itself an act of obedience, and the offering of Cain, in its very form, a proof of presumption. We must be contented to leave this part of the enquiry where the Word of God has left it. In the absence of express guidance there, we dare not assert with confidence that it was in the material of the two offerings that God saw the presence

or the absence of an acceptable principle. In proportion as we lay the stress of the difference more upon the spirit and less upon the form of the sacrifice, we shall be more certainly warranted by the inspired Word, and more immediately within the reach of its application to ourselves.

We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews the following description of the offering of Abel. *By faith Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh; not only at the time of his death, when the accusing voice of his blood cried unto God from the ground on which it had fallen, but still—still after many centuries—testifying to the one distinguishing principle and the one supporting hope in which God's people from the very beginning have all been one.* It was by faith that Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain. It was because of the presence of faith in Abel that God had respect unto him and to his offering. It was because of the absence of faith in Cain that to him and to his offering God had not respect. Here we are upon sure ground. Here we are speaking only where God, and so far as God, has spoken first. God saw in Abel a spirit of faith: and in Cain God did not see a spirit of faith. Therefore Cain and Abel were our examples, not by a forced or a remote application, but by a direct and immediate likeness. The test to which they were brought, all those ages ago, is the very test to which we are all subjected. We too bring offerings. Every age and every land has tried to do

so. The heart of man in its furthest estrangement is conscious that God has a claim upon His creatures; and, if it were only to pacify conscience, something must be brought and something must be done to satisfy this claim. We cannot live without worship. At least, it takes a long time, and many struggles—yes, struggles—as many struggles, almost, as, if properly directed, would make a man a Christian—to enable any one of us to live without God and not be fearful of the consequences. Therefore most of us offer something. A daily form of prayer, however brief and hurried; a weekly attendance here, however spiritless and perfunctory; all of us give this: it is our offering. Cain brought his offering as well as Abel: Judas brought his offering as well as John: we bring ours. And there is no fault, perhaps, to be found with the nature, with the material, of the offering. We are not sure that there was any fault of this kind in Cain's offering. We dare not say for certain that, when Cain brought his basket of fruit or his sheaf of corn to present it before the Lord, it was a sin in him not to have begged or bought one of Abel's sheep, that so the sacrifice might be one of a typical life's blood, and not of mere gratitude or mere self-denial. Certainly in *our* offering there is nothing wrong externally. God is a Spirit: and they who worship God now must worship Him as a Spirit; worship Him with spiritual offerings, not with gifts either of natural produce or of sacrificial blood. The human tongue, with its divers utterances of praise and supplication, is the instrument by which we must worship; and we have brought no

other. Or, if another, if in one single instance, as on this day, we do bring, besides, a little offering of a visible oblation; if, kneeling at that table, we do, in that one service, ask God to accept, not our alms only for His poor, but also our oblations—His creatures, as it is afterwards said, of bread and wine, to be eaten and drunk in His presence; yet is this in obedience to an express command of our Saviour Christ, who instituted this as a perpetual commemoration of His precious death for sin, to be continued until His coming again. Here too, here above all, none can find fault with the material of our offering: here therefore again we have to look at the instructive example proposed for us in the text, to see whether in any sense it can be hoped or feared, with respect to different members of this congregation, that God has respect to one of us and to his offering, but to another and to his offering He has not respect.

It was by faith that Abel offered to God, and it was by want of faith that Cain failed to offer to God, an acceptable sacrifice. And so it is now. The bodies of us all are here: and the right sounds issue from our lips; right sounds, and the same from all: what then can be wanting? Why is the worship of one accepted, and the worship of another disregarded? Why? Because one has faith, and another has no faith. And what is faith? *Faith is*, as the Chapter just referred to tells us, *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*. Faith is, the looking not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. Faith is a spiritual sight of things spiritual; let

us rather say, of Him who is invisible and eternal. In daily life, faith is the setting God always before us; the walking before God; the doing and saying and thinking all things as in His presence; the having Him more powerfully present to us than the attractions or the temptations or the provocations of things below; the being able to say, and to act upon the resolution, *This will I do, for I fear God*, and again, *How can I do this wickedness and sin against God?* More especially is it, the consciousness of Christ; the being assured, the remembering, and loving to remember, Him who died for us, and rose again; and the actual endeavour to set our affections on things above, where He sitteth at the right hand of God. This, carried into its consequences, is the daily life of faith.

And now what is it in worship? How does faith enable, or the want of faith forbid, a man to offer an acceptable offering? How was it that Abel offered? how was it that Cain did not offer? Surely, the worship of faith is the concentrated energy of the life of faith. In worship a man who has faith is not only remembering God as a check upon sin, or as a motive to diligence, or as an encouragement to hope, or as a stimulus to watchfulness; not only thinking of Christ as One who is, and is all-powerful to help, and all-sufficient to make reconciliation, and long-suffering to our infirmities and our backslidings; but also, making application to Him as such; entering into His presence as such; communing and interceding with Him as such; making use of His sonship and of His redemption; gaining new supplies of grace and strength,

from Him whom he knows as his Father, through Him whom he knows as his Redeemer and as his High-Priest in heaven. This is faith as exercised in worship. Where God sees this, there He has respect to our offering: where God sees not this, to that person and to his offering He has not respect.

My brethren, this suggests a very serious question. It is right that we should come hither, as on this day, to praise and to ask of God: but it is not certain that in so doing we are doing more than Cain did: he brought of the produce of his ground, and stood before God with it as a worshipper and as an offerer. Yet to him and to his offering God had not respect, because he offered not in faith. He did not realize God's presence as his Creator, his Benefactor, his Owner, and his God. He did not feel towards God, as a creature, owing everything to Him, ought to have felt. His worship was a mere homage, empty and ceremonial: and God, who looks on the heart, saw in it nothing. He had no respect to the offering: He could not regard it as having any value or any meaning. And Cain was angry at this: not penitent, not ashamed, not sorry: he did not pray and struggle for a better mind: he was very wroth, and his countenance fell. O what a picture of the natural man in all times! The disregarded, the refused, the unrespected worshipper, goes away angry: he never sees the cause of the refusal in himself: he never admits that the reason of his rejection lay in the worldliness, or the sinfulness, or the unbelief, of his own spirit: no, he thinks it hard that he should have humbled himself to worship, and not been noticed; that he should have taken the trouble to kneel

and to respond, and God did not regard him. *He was very wrath, and his countenance fell.* O, my brethren, let us learn a better lesson from the truth before us! Let us acknowledge that without faith it is impossible to please God, unreasonable to expect to please Him. He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and must approach Him in the one way which He has marked out.

And how shall we know whether God has respect to us and to our offering? How shall we know, each one of us, as we kneel this morning at Christ's holy Table, whether we, we personally, are among the regarded or the unregarded worshippers? Cain knew it, we may suppose, by the absence of the heavenly fire which consumed his brother's sacrifice. When Abel offered, the flame of God fell, and consumed the offering; attested the faith of the suppliant, and crowned it with a visible acceptance. When Cain offered, all was still: the fruit or the grain lay there upon the earth-built altar; lay, and was disregarded: the worshipper himself might fetch it away: He to whom it was nominally presented did not want, did not notice, did not care for it. These signals are of the past. The fire of God is now, like His sacrifice, spiritual: it is only in the heart within that the one is presented or that the other is vouchsafed. Yet is there such a thing as a sense of acceptance; such a thing as the Spirit of God witnessing with our spirit that we are His sons; a comfort of love, and a confidence of communion, to testify that we are heard, and to send us on our way rejoicing. These things may still be looked for, and expected, and prayed for, in our worship: if we have no consciousness of being heard, none ever, we

have reason to enter into judgment with ourselves as to the cause of this want: may there not be some secret thing kept back from the Lord, or some attempt to mix together heaven and the world, or some culpable remissness and carelessness in worship, interfering with the brightness and with the directness of the spiritual vision? These things we may fear: these things should be looked into: lest perhaps our worship itself should be nugatory, lest our very prayers should be turned into sin. But, after all, the proof of acceptance lies yet more decisively in the after than in the present results: do we, when we go hence, find ourselves, if not comforted, yet at least strengthened? do we find that we have received something of real help against sin; something which has made us more successful in realizing to ourselves God and Christ, more earnest to fight the good fight of faith, or more loving in our spirit towards those who thwart us, or try us, or provoke? If we have this, we can almost dispense with the other: strength is better than comfort: at all events we can wait God's time for His comfort, if He only gives us His strength: he who finds himself a little more earnest, a little more serious, a little more consistent, in consequence of worship, can afford to endure patiently the delay of a bright hope or a positive assurance.

And yet, why not both these things? Why not both comfort and strength? Surely *the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. Ask, and ye shall have: knock, and it shall be opened.*

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY,
February 3, 1861.

SERMON IV.

FEATURES OF CHARITY.

I CORINTHIANS XIII. 5.

Charity doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.

WE enter this week upon a season of humiliation. Our thoughts are to be turned to the special subject of sin and repentance. Is it quite by chance that the Epistle for the preceding Sunday is the 13th Chapter of St Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians? Or is there not something, in this choice, of preparation, designed preparation, for the special work of Lent?

I do not suppose that there is one of us who can listen unmoved to the description of charity, or Christian love, as it is here set before us by St Paul. And when we see the importance which he, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, attached to this particular grace; when we hear him say that all spiritual gifts are valueless without it; when we hear him say that prophecy is nothing, and knowledge is nothing, and faith itself is nothing, without charity; when we hear him say that even self-denial, self-devotion, and self-sacrifice for the good of others, is

nothing, unless there be also in the heart, as the motive of all, the spirit of a living charity; then surely the thought must press upon us very heavily, what is charity? and, have I charity? have I that particular grace or fruit of the Spirit, which is something distinct from faith, distinct from piety, distinct even from almsgiving and from the service of the poor? have I, in my heart and in my life, *that most excellent gift of charity, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before God?* Thus we are led, first to the searching of the Scriptures, and then to the examination of ourselves: and I am much mistaken if the result of this process will not be to awaken anxiety and even alarm, lest perhaps, after a long profession of faith, after *doing many things and hearing gladly*, we be found destitute of the one Christian characteristic, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.

I have selected for consideration this morning just one verse of the Chapter, containing four brief clauses. Each of these clauses adds one feature to the portraiture of charity. We shall look at each separately.

1. First, *charity doth not behave itself unseemly*. The expression in the original is still shorter. Its first meaning is this: *is not shapeless, is not misshapen, is not indecorous, rude, or unmannerly*. A strange element, we might think, in the composition of charity! Not indecorous, not rude, or unmannerly—what has that to do with charity? Reflect a little, and you will perceive that this also is no small thing to mention, and that it bears very directly upon the grace spoken of.

In this, as in other cases, we see a thing best by its opposite. Have we ever noticed such a thing as inde-

corum, unmannerliness, rudeness, in persons claiming to be Christians? Yes, it is sometimes made a part of religion so to be. There are those who make what they call faithfulness the one virtue. They are so fearful of disguising their own convictions, and so fearful of encouraging carelessness or false security in others, that they run into an opposite extreme, and would obtrude upon the notice of every passer-by those truths or those feelings of which the whole value is in their depth and in their humility. It may be that there are some to whom God has given a peculiar power of startling others into conviction by a mode of presenting His truths which on other lips would be simply offensive and repulsive. There may be such persons, and He who has peculiarly endowed may peculiarly bless. But for others, for Christian persons generally, it is not safe to forget the special warning which Christ has given (in His own emphatic figure) against *casting pearls before swine*, or the remarkable feature here presented to us by this Apostle in the delineation of the grace of charity, that it is never unmannerly. To ask a stranger, casually and suddenly, whether he is a converted man, whether he has the love of Christ in his heart, whether he is on his way to heaven or hell, &c., is the language of impertinence rather than of duty, with regard to which the words of the text may warn us that true charity doeth not so; knowing that, for one person driven by these rough means into the path of peace, many will rather be diverted and deterred from a religion so indifferent to the rules of propriety and of good taste.

True Christian charity is deeply concerned about the

souls of men, and would count no labour and no sacrifice too great if she might but save one. But charity is not rudeness, not impertinence, not self-sufficiency, and not arrogance. One part of charity is courtesy. And, depend upon it, courtesy, which is consideration for the feelings of others, will in the long run win more souls to Christ than rudeness. Where we are sure that courtesy is genuine; not timidity, not time-serving, not a mere wish to please, but a delicacy of perception and a tenderness of feeling; there nothing is so attractive; attractive, not only in the sense of conciliating personal regard, but even in the sense of recommending godliness and drawing minds and hearts to Christ.

I am not counselling silence at all times upon the concerns of the soul. There are persons charged with a ministry, who must be instant in season and out of season. There are affronts offered to Christ in the world, which require of those who love Him that they speak out, even to protest, even to reprove. There is such a thing as compromise. There is such a thing as cowardice. There is such a thing as being ashamed of Christ before men. And we know who has said that of such persons He will Himself be ashamed when He returns in glory. If charity is not rude, neither is she cowardly.

And, if charity has to guard against rudeness in the things of God, much more will she abhor it in the things of self. For one person who is unmannerly in Christ's behalf, a thousand and ten thousand are unmannerly, obtrusive, pushing, and impertinent, in their own behalf. Let these see in the words before us a grave reproof and a serious warning for themselves. If it is wrong to be

indecorous for a heavenly Master, much more must inconsiderateness and coarseness of feeling be repugnant to charity when destitute of any such excusing or atoning motive. *Charity doth not behave itself unseemly.*

2. Secondly, *charity seeketh not her own.* We have already seen something of a reason why this clause should follow closely upon the former. The courtesy of charity must not be selfishness. A man might seem to be mindful of the charge not to be unmannerly, and yet be wholly regardless of the next caution, that he be not selfish.

All seek their own, St Paul complains, *not the things which are Jesus Christ's.* How true a saying! How prevalent, how almost universal, is the spirit of self-seeking! When man, in the Fall, broke loose from God, he broke loose also from his brother. The natural man is not ungodly only; he is selfish too. In fact, it is only in God that hearts can really meet. It is only so far as it succeeds in turning both alike to God, that any ministry can be effectual (to use the language of the last verse of the Old Testament) in *turning the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers*: they meet in Him as their common centre.

My brethren, when we speak of selfishness, we can only lay ourselves in the dust, and mourn together. Who is not selfish? selfish in common things, in little things, in the things of everyday life? Who does not grudge trouble? or, if not all trouble, yet trouble of any kind which is not self-chosen and self-imposed? Who does not dislike being put out of his own way; having his plans for the day broken in upon; having his few mo-

ments of relaxation and refreshment curtailed yet further by some unexpected and unwelcome call? But we might go further, and say, Whose religion, whose charity, is not somewhat selfish? Is there any one who really desires, in doing good to others, their good more than his own? How many of us, in visiting the poor, are really aiming at gratitude! really seeking, if not the applause of lookers on—and do not be absolutely sure that there is not a little even of this feeling lurking within—yet at least the thanks and the love of those to whom we are ministering, instead of the result itself; the good, in soul or in body, of the person benefited or served! In this case, charity herself is seeking her own.

And in another sense too. In serving others, we may be thinking of ourselves, even without aiming at gratitude. We may do it as a duty, as a means of gaining good for ourselves, of promoting our own salvation, or even with some lingering relics of an idea of merit. Do not think that I would strain too far the demand of a disinterested motive. It is well for the world that charity should work in it anyhow, from any motive. And it is far better, even for ourselves, that we should be diligent in the service of others, whatever the imperfection of our motive, than not diligent. And we may pass through lower motives to higher; gradually purifying our work from the dross of selfishness as we go on and get forward. Still I think that it is good for us, both as an exercise of salutary humiliation, and still more as a means of casting out evil from our hearts and lives, to contemplate the diviner form of a real Christian charity as it is set before us in the pages of Holy Scripture: to remind ourselves, for

example, that then only is charity perfect, even as its Source and its Inspirer is perfect, when in no sense it seeks its own; when neither the desire of human applause or human gratitude, nor even the desire of self-improvement, much less of self-approval or self-justifying, has any place in it, but the heart has learnt something of that most sublime of all exercises of self-forgetfulness and self-sacrifice to which St Paul had risen when he wrote the memorable though sometimes misunderstood sentence, *I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren.*

Charity seeketh not her own. Charity is altogether unselfish. Just so far as self enters even into our best deeds, in that same degree we are without charity. And if the best of men have deplored to the end of life how wanting they were in the grace of an entire self-forgetfulness, may we not, here also, apply the subject to some persons, in this as in every congregation, who never know what it is even for a moment to seek any one's good or any one's pleasure but their own, and urge them, by the love of Christ and by the hope of heaven, to practise themselves, ere it be too late, at least in little self-denials, if perhaps a better spirit may by degrees be formed in them, and they may rise at last to something of that mind which was in Christ Jesus?

3. In the third place, the text tells us that *charity is not easily provoked.* I fear we must confess that the word *easily* is no part of the verse as St Paul wrote it. Whence it crept in, I know not. Whether it was really felt that the rule was beyond human reach without it; or whether some mere accident occasioned its insertion;

these questions are comparatively unimportant: but I fear that we must read the words without modification, *Charity is not provoked.*

It is not said that charity is never angry. On the contrary, we read of our Lord Himself that on one occasion He looked round upon an audience *with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.* And the same holy Apostle, whose words are now before us, writes elsewhere, *Be ye angry, and sin not:* implying that all anger is not sinful. It is right to be indignant at some things: we may well wish that there were more amongst us than there is of righteous indignation at things mean and shameful, acts of revenge and lust and cruelty. St Paul says of himself, *Who is offended,* that is, caused to offend, hindered and injured in his Christian course, *and I burn not,* that is, with holy anger on his behalf?

Charity is not provoked refers to different matters. It follows closely upon, and indeed springs directly out of the foregoing particular, *seeketh not her own.* Selfishness, self-pleasing, and self-seeking, is the common cause of provocation. If we had no self in us, we should not be provoked, no, not once in a thousand times, as we now are. How seldom does provocation really arise out of a disinterested care for the good of others! How seldom are we, like our Lord, simply grieved because of the hardness of another's heart; simply concerned to think of the dishonour done to God, and the risk brought upon a brother's soul by unbelief, ungodliness, and sin! Or, even if there be something of this motive for anger, yet how mixed is

it with lower regards ; with vexation, perhaps, because we can make no impression ; with irritation at the perverseness which will not see aright ; or with weariness in the disappointment of efforts to correct and to improve ! And how true is it, that when once charity is provoked, it ceases to be of any avail ; ceases to influence, because it ceases indeed to be charity ! O, if we would be of any use one to another ; if we would move in the world as Christ's witnesses, whether among equals or among inferiors ; we must pray without ceasing for a gentle and a loving soul ; even for *that ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.*

4. In the fourth and last place, it is said, *Charity thinketh no evil.* This is a different thing from *Charity believeth all things, or hopeth all things,* of which we read below. *Thinketh no evil* is, properly, *reckoneth not that which is evil.* In other words, Christian charity is shown in not keeping an account of injuries or of unkindnesses ; in not registering and recording acts or words of neglect, contempt, or wrong ; in not entering such things in the tablets of memory, as if for a future day of human reckoning or of divine retribution. Some minds, my brethren, are strangely tenacious of such things. It is in vain to remind them—in vain they do remind themselves—of shortcomings and offences of their own : in vain do we say, O bring not upon yourselves the judgment of the unmerciful servant ! O provoke not God, by your harsh, uncharitable, unforgiving spirit towards men, to remember your far greater debt of sin towards Him ! O be willing, when you

remember how wrongly, how ungenerously, how suspiciously, and how contemptuously, you have yourself often spoken or acted towards others, to forgive and to forget a few such acts and words when they have injured or wounded *you* ! In vain, I say : for charity is the gift of God only : *Send Thy Holy Ghost*, we pray, *and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity* : charity is the gift of God, given by His Spirit, given in answer to earnest prayer, given as the fruit of many watchings and strivings, of many struggles with ourselves and many conflicts with Satan : no wonder therefore if they who ask not and believe not, are not charitable, do not love !

Charity reckoneth not evil ; preserves no record of it, keeps no account against it. There was an expression in ancient times, denoting one of the great boons promised to the populace in a revolutionary crisis. That boon was called *new tablets* ; new account-books : in other words, the cancelling of the old ; the abolition of all outstanding debts. In that application, however attractive in its sound, however expedient at certain times in order to prevent worse consequences, it was not an act of justice, and it was a dangerous precedent. But, in the sense in which I now use it, it involves no danger, and, on the whole, taking one side with another, no injustice. If we have all something to forgive, have we not all something also to be forgiven ? Let us have new tablets this Lent ! Let us agree to cancel all outstanding debts ! Let us turn our thoughts from earthly dues to heavenly ; from things owing to us to things owing by us ; yes, owing by us

both to man and God! Let us start afresh! Let charity reckon no evil: let charity destroy her old account-books, and forget the past! We cannot deal with our own sins, till we have done with those of others. *If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, or thou thyself (might we not venture to add?) against thy brother, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.* More than that we do not even pray for: can we look for more?

CHARITY IS NOT RUDE.

CHARITY IS NOT SELFISH.

CHARITY IS NOT PROVOKED.

CHARITY RECKONS NOT THE EVIL.

Such are a few of the features of that divine grace. There are others, and we should study all. But even these few have humbled us. Even these few enter into judgment with us, and condemn us. Let us not be satisfied with recording the sentence, and thus flattering self-love with a dream of great humility. Let us rather see how arousing, how stimulating, yes, how invigorating, if rightly used, is the word which humbles. We must pray, and we must struggle, for the grace of Christian courtesy, that we may be wise to win souls; not insolent, not arrogant, not awkward, not repulsive. We must pray, and we must struggle, for the grace of Christian unselfishness; beginning to practise it in little things, and passing on by degrees

to greater. We must pray, and we must struggle, for the grace of an unprovokable spirit; remembering how we have provoked God, and yet He has been patient. We must pray, and we must struggle, for a short memory in evil; for the power, not to forgive only, as men too often count forgiveness, but to forget also; the power to sponge well every night the heart's tablets, that they may preserve no mark of bad impression until the morrow. This if we do, seriously, daily, and in God's presence—on our knees, with the windows well open towards the heavenly temple—He will help us. God is nearer to us than we think: and in His presence is strength.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY,
February 10, 1861.

SERMON V.

THE CAKE NOT TURNED.

HOSEA VII. 8.

Ephraim is a cake not turned.

THE language of Scripture is largely borrowed from common life. Most often, from natural objects; fields and trees, sea and sky, the means and processes of vegetation and agriculture. But sometimes in-door life is laid under contribution for spiritual illustration. Sometimes it is a feast, with its bright lights, its good cheer, and its merry guests within, in contrast with an outer darkness and a sad exclusion. Sometimes it is a humbler matter still; a lost piece of money, and a woman sweeping the house till she finds it. Sometimes it is one of the processes by which food is prepared for strengthening man's heart, and the poorest man or woman is taught how to find profit for the soul out of an occupation which seems to be wholly confined to things sensible and earthly. You would be surprised, if you looked into a Concordance of Holy Scripture, to see how large a space is occupied by the word *bread*. We might almost say that bread has been

consecrated by the Bible, the Old Testament and still more the New, to *such an excellent mystery* that by it is typified and represented the work of grace in the heart of man.

Now of this character is the figure employed in the text. *Ephraim is a cake not turned.* Ephraim, in its original meaning here, denotes the kingdom of Israel or of the Ten Tribes. But I am sure I need not say that that which is written of a rebellious and perverse nation has its exact counterpart in the individual; nay, that it was only because true of individuals that it was ever true of a nation; and that human nature, fallen human nature, is of one stock and of one blood in all times, so that, if we get below the surface (God's Word guiding us) with reference to one man in one age, we are quite sure to find the same thing true of the depth of some other heart in some other age—yes, in germ at least, true of every other heart in every other age. Ephraim, being interpreted, is man. At least, he is many a man, under circumstances at all similar to those of the Israelites at the time spoken of. In other words, the character ascribed in God's Word to Israel of old is the character of very many persons to whom God has spoken, whom He has brought within the pale of His covenant and of His Church, and striven with through long years by the inward pleadings and remonstrances of His Spirit. Ephraim, so understood, is compared in this passage to a cake not turned.

English history has treasured among its anecdotes of a favourite royal hero, one which tells us of a cake not turned. The disguised sovereign, occupied with

graver cares, forgot the duties of the task which he had assumed, and left the countrywoman's bread to spoil for lack of turning. Such is the very emblem here employed by God's Prophet. There is something in the character of some men which resembles a burnt loaf; a cake left too long with one side exposed to the fire, till it has caught and been scorched, while the other side is still mere dough. So condescending is the language of Divine Revelation, when it seeks to show us to ourselves as we are! A little accident, familiar to every cottage and to every kitchen, is seized by the wisdom of God, and made the vehicle of correction and instruction in righteousness. May He help us so to use it!

The character described is easily legible. It is that in which there is a too much and a too little. One side is overdone, the other is underdone. There is nothing even and equable in the compound. It is in pieces and patches: here a lump of dough, and there a cinder: here that which must be cut off because it is too dry and too black for mastication, and there that which must be left upon the plate because it is too moist and too sticky for digestion. I am sure, my brethren, if we think of it, we all know such characters. Some of us, who look closely within, may perhaps be constrained to confess, Certainly I know one such!

It is intended, you know, that the grace of God, or by whatever other term we designate the thing spoken of, should go through and through the whole of us. The comparison slightly varied gives us the leaven which is hid in the meal till the whole is

leavened. Just so is it in the baking. That which has been first thoroughly mixed, and then thoroughly leavened, must last of all be thoroughly baked. Every part of the mind and life—the principles and the affections, the temper and the spirit, the motives and the conduct, the feelings towards God and the feelings towards man—ought to be alike and equally influenced by the presence of the Holy Spirit within. The cake is imperfectly mixed, imperfectly leavened, or imperfectly baked, if it be not so. The whole man ought to move together in God's love and in God's service. It is the want of this unity, this coherence and consistency of parts, this combination and harmony of all elements in one whole, which makes the words true of any human character, *Ephraim is a cake not turned.*

And this might be exemplified in many ways.

1. There is, first, the case which the context seems to point to; an inconsistency arising from too much of voluntary intermixture with the world. *Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people:* he hath mingled himself among the surrounding heathen, and learned their ways: *Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him,* testifying to a loss of strength, to a decay of vigour, *yet he knoweth not.* A very graphic picture of the life of many! Certainly some are very arbitrary in their definitions of the world. They do not understand the difference between the heathenism which surrounded Israel of old or the Christian Church in its first beginnings, and the nominal Christianity which is about us on every side

now. We have no right to ignore Baptism and Communion, profession of faith and attendance on ordinances. These things are not unimportant. For good or else for evil, they make a distinction between him who has them and him who has them not. Still for practical purposes, as a matter of Christian prudence and of Christian consistency, we must put a difference now between some and others even of our fellow-worshippers. A brother who walks among us disorderly, who is either notoriously sinful in his life, or whose influence, at all events, is entirely adverse to religion, cannot be regarded by us, nor ought he to be, as a fitting friend or companion for one who desires above all things to save his soul alive. And there is such a thing in these days as a man *mixing himself among* such persons, and becoming by that intermixture like a cake unturned. His religion may become in that way rather an incongruous adjunct than a pervading leaven. He may still have a religion: he may still think himself religious: he may continue a worshipper, he may continue a communicant: he may have prayers in his family, and prayers in his chamber: but his life is not religion; his day is spent away from God; his prayers are isolated from his occupations and isolated from his interests; his heart is in the world, whatever his professions or even his occasional wishes be.

2. Or, again, there is the still sadder case, if it be possible, of one who is tied and bound by the chain of some evil habit. How much that is beautiful and apparently hopeful in a character may coexist, for a time at least, with a sin! In the end, no doubt, the

forcible words of this Prophet are made good in every instance of a life of sensuality, *Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart*. Fearful are the exemplifications of this saying—of the heartlessness of the sensualist—in human life. They meet us everywhere: patent among the poor; discernible, doubtless, to a closer inspection, in the homes of the wealthy. But this, in its full developement, belongs to a late stage of sin. In its beginnings there may be a great mixture of good. Sometimes there is a considerable amount of piety, of religious feeling I mean, in a character which has its dark spot all the time. Often there is in it what I may call a pathos and a plaintiveness very touching and even attractive. If the strong man despises, the humble Christian cannot but pity, may almost love. That profound sense of sinfulness, that exceeding bitter cry which rises in the hearing of God or man from a self-condemning heart, that deep humility, that tenderness in judging, that consideration for the feelings and faults of others—all which are sometimes characteristic of a man vainly struggling rather under than against a prevailing evil temper or victorious evil lust—are things not to be witnessed without compassion even by one who cannot, for his Master's sake, be indifferent to the guilt, or blind to the danger, of the sin which thus reigns. The words of the text may well recur to us as we contemplate such a case. O that the whole man were what a part of him is! O that that inconsistency could be reconciled! O that that tenderness and that humility could but have been combined with purity, or that generous warmth of feeling with some command

of speech and of temper! How beautiful then might have been the compound, where at present we can but admire a few separate ingredients! Would that God's grace might even yet bring unity into that confusion, casting out that which is evil, and claiming for His own that which is good! He has done so, for a few at least, even in this most perilous and fatal case of all: He has, here and there, given a man the victory even over a sin which had long led him captive: often enough to forbid despair, though not often enough to preclude deep anxiety.

3. But the subject is still far from being exhausted: I feel rather that we have as yet scarcely sounded its depths. The peculiar point in it is the imperfect diffusion of good through the whole man; the exaggeration of some parts to the disparagement of others; the one side overdone, and the other scarcely touched, by the fire of truth and grace. How applicable is this description to some characters to which we can scarcely deny the title of religious; some which perhaps most confidently arrogate that title to themselves! How often have we seen in such persons zeal without tenderness; energy without repose; eagerness for what they deem truths, without charity towards those whom they count in error; a distortion, for themselves and others, of the whole proportion and balance of the Gospel, by pressing one truth as if it were all the truth, and casting into the shade of practical disregard other things which a more impartial reader of God's Word would see to occupy a primary place! And great dishonour is done to Christ oftentimes by such distortions and by such

onesidedness. Great injustice is often done to personal merits of a different and less obtrusive order. Men are regarded as far behind in the Christian race, who in all save the loudness of their profession or the narrowness of their view may be far forwarder than their judges. And, what is worse, many honest struggling men are so discouraged in their estimate of themselves, and so deterred by the representation thus made to them of Christ's Gospel, that they are really thrown back in the race, or diverted into some erratic course the end of which can scarcely be recognized as the Christian's heaven. Such are some of the evil results of that imperfect blending of Christian graces, that disproportionate developement in one character of the various elements of true perfection, which we have so often to deplore even in religious persons, and to which no figure of comparison could be more appropriate than that drawn for us in the words of the Prophet, *Ephraim is a cake not turned.*

4. And, if applicable thus far to Christian men, what shall we say of the bearing of the subject upon persons who have not yet taken a decisive step towards Christ's service? Is there no inequality, no jar, no disorder, in their being also? What if in many of them conscience is at variance with practice, conviction with conduct? If you are not inwardly convinced that there is something in Christ which is not to be dispensed with and not elsewhere to be found, why are you here? I would fain believe that that which is indicated by your presence among Christ's worshippers is in reality the very deepest and truest part of your being. It is not

that I would teach you that you are guilty of hypocrisy or false profession in coming hither. That is dangerous language, and not more dangerous, I believe, than false. Rather would I urge you to cherish that habit, of coming to hear Christ's Word read and preached, and of joining in His public worship, as one of the links which still connect you with the realities which lie above, and which lie within, and which lie before you. But then, my brethren, if you are not to discontinue worship, let it mean something! It will not do to have two parts of you entirely severed and at variance. Your faith in Christ, which you express by worship, must not be confined to worship. If you call Him *Lord, Lord*, you must also try to do the things which he says. O, if there be in you but one thing which He disapproves, be assured that it will be for your happiness to part with it—certainly it will be for your happiness to *have* parted with it: make the effort in His name and strength, and He will enable you. And, not less, endeavour to carry the thought of Him into your daily life in all its parts. Try to understand, and try to exemplify, what is meant by even eating and drinking to God's glory—by temperance and by thankfulness—by using moderately what He gives, and by praising and remembering Him in your hearts over it. You will never be really happy until your life is at one. The *cake not turned* is a spoilt and damaged thing; good neither for food nor show: men cast it out. Pray and strive that it be not a figure descriptive of you. Let your prayer, and the prayer of all of us, be that of the

inspired Psalmist, *Unite my heart to fear thy Name.* Yes, bring all its scattered parts into one whole. Reason and conscience and will, judgment and affection, energy and enjoyment, thought and speech, soul and spirit, mind and life, let each in its office serve Thee, and let the whole be Thine. *Then are they glad, because they are at rest: and so he bringeth them unto the haven where they would be.* In God alone is the rest of man: he that findeth Christ findeth peace.

Unity is happiness, and unity is strength. If you see that the Lord is God, follow Him; follow Him whithersoever He goeth. If you hear the voice within, saying, *This is the way, walk thou in it;* if conscience tells you that a particular thing is right, because Christ commands it, or a particular thing wrong, because it might lead you or another into sin, into some occupation or some indulgence which Christ in His Gospel has forbidden; let that be decisive: an hour later you will be glad of it. No man can serve two masters; God and the world, Christ and self, Christ and sin. It is misery to attempt it. They are the wretched men of this world, not who live entirely for the world, not who live entirely for God, but, who have just light enough to prevent their forgetting Him, and not decision enough to be His wholly. They are the wretched men: others have the world to enjoy, and there is some enjoyment in it so long as men can forget the last end: and others, again, have God to enjoy, and His service is perfect freedom, and in it is nothing to be forgotten: but *they have neither;* they miss both worlds: and a

weary bondage they suffer. Well may the text say to each of us, Be one man, not two : make up your mind, and let mind and life move together. *God is one* : let him who is God's be one also.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT,

February 24, 1861.

SERMON VI.

THE DANGER OF RELAPSE.

HEBREWS X. 38.

*If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure
in him.*

THOSE of us who have ever had to do with sickness know the serious import of the word "relapse." "What we have to guard against is a relapse" is the expression of a most pressing anxiety: the tidings, "He has had a relapse," must sound in every ear with much of the awfulness of a death-warrant.

It is my purpose to-night to speak to you of that which is analogous to this in the soul. "The danger of relapse" is our subject. I would address myself to it, not so much as the physician, but rather as the friend or the relative of the patient; nay, as one compassed himself with every danger which can beset or befall the weakest and the most sinful.

It is not obvious to every one, on first hearing the word, that "relapse" is synonymous with "backsliding." It is the Latin form of that English word. And yet it seems to convey to us a more real and tangible

sense. Backsliding is a term appropriated to religious subjects: relapse is a term of wider use, applicable to bodily as well as spiritual matters, and, in the same proportion, as it appears to me, more natural and more significant.

In either case, you will notice that the force of the word lies in its indication of a gradual process. A relapse is a gliding or slipping back. There is nothing in it of suddenness or of violence. Whatever the result may be, however unexpected or however fatal, the word denotes that the process and progress towards it has been easy and perhaps imperceptible. And we shall readily understand that in that particular point lies the main risk and peril.

To give something of clearness and definiteness to the remarks now to be made upon it, we may separate the two cases, of act, and of spirit; of particular habits and tendencies, and of the general mind and life. In each of these there may be either a progress towards recovery, or else a relapse: and the danger of relapse will be sufficiently evident when we draw out into a few serious thoughts the thing which that word indicates.

1. And first in its reference to particular acts and habits.

All of us have known, either for ourselves, or in those near to us, what it is to fall into a bad habit. Habits are of all kinds: it is a word which we use indiscriminately with reference to small things and great; to bodily, mental, and spiritual acts; to matters which are mere tricks of manner or gesture, as

well as to grave moral concerns on which the life or death of the soul may hang.

A great part of early education, in the nursery and the school-room, is taken up with the prevention or correction of bad habits. Little faults of deportment, mere awkwardnesses and rudenesses of tone or posture, give early teachers much trouble, and we are deeply indebted to those who will take that trouble with us. Again, in our childish or youthful lessons, certain tendencies early show themselves towards particular mistakes: special defects, of natural talent, or of attention and industry, lead to a perpetual repetition of the same error; only to be overcome, if at all, by an equally incessant struggle, on the part alike of the teacher and of the taught. And, once more, how obstinate, how wearisome to ourselves and others, are those faults of temper which form the first battle-field of the child with indwelling sin; faults of pride or of passion, of irritability or of sullenness, as the case may be; which, if left uncorrected, will be the torment of a lifetime, and which, with all the care and pains that can be bestowed upon them, are seldom perhaps so entirely eradicated as to give no trouble at all even to the grown man, even to the established Christian!

Now, taking these very simple and elementary experiences as illustrations of three kinds of bad habit; the first concerned mainly with the body, the second with the mind or understanding, and the third with the spirit or soul; we can all see in them, though on a very humble scale, what is meant by the danger of a relapse.

It sometimes happens that this early home-training is temporarily interrupted. Perhaps a mother, whose whole time is given to the care of her children, is laid aside for a time by sickness, or called from home by some demand of duty. A few weeks pass, during which she has been compelled to leave her children in the hands of servants, or of some person less wise or less keenly interested than herself in the true discipline of those concerned. How often, under these circumstances, do we hear of what in reference to graver or later faults we should have to call a relapse! Tricks of manner, once corrected, are again as bad as ever. Inattentions and carelessnesses and slovenlinesses over lessons, are all come back, and the combat must begin afresh. Bad tempers of whatever kind, irritable, morose, passionate, have resumed their hold, and the work of faithful and judicious discipline is felt to be thrown back by weeks or months, and to require to be absolutely begun again. There has been, in all senses, a relapse: and in the judgment of a true educator and a true Christian a relapse is always and at every age a matter of great anxiety and of great danger.

But there comes a time when this danger is terribly aggravated, and the everlasting state of a soul comes to be bound up in it.

The life of home, we will suppose, is for the present ended, and the boy or young man goes forth to a place of far less constant, less tender, and less anxious watching. He is left to form for himself—and it is needful that sooner or later he should do so—his own habits of good or evil. And even if he still remains under his

parent's roof, he will yet have to do this. An age comes, at which self-management and individual responsibility become, in the order of God's Providence, the burden of each one of us, and to attempt to bear it for one another can end in nothing but disappointment and injury. It is a very serious time, and it sets vividly before us the anxieties of that probation which is our lot below. I need not and cannot trace in detail the thousand influences which begin to affect life, inward and outward, at this stage. It is enough to say, as one speaking to those who know it, that multitudes—I dare not institute any comparison of numbers, so as to say what proportion, or anything like what proportion, of human characters may thus be described—but multitudes, at all events, do fall under most injurious influences, in conduct and habit, at the entrance upon mature life. Sinful and vicious habits, learned from without or springing from within, do lead captive many a young life. In many instances, the sin and its consequences are incurred almost or quite unawares. There is no positive consciousness of either, until the poison has been drunk in. The life of many a young man is thenceforth a life of disquiet, of unrest—happier if of conflict. Many fight not at all, but yield to their sin day by day. Many repent of it every morning, and before night as regularly, are again fallen. Some—many, we are sure, these also—are awakened, under some one of those many providential influences for good which are always counterworking the snares and mines of evil, to a deep sense of the sinfulness of sin, and to an earnest and effectual repentance, shown, as true re-

penitance is sure to be, by a recovery, under God's grace daily sought and cherished, from the dominion and bondage of their sin. Though life can no longer be ignorant of evil, or (in one sense) innocent of evil, it may yet be cleansed and purged from evil; graver, sadder, than once it was, but not therefore disconsolate, and not therefore unblessed, and not therefore inoperative for the highest and noblest good. If a young man *cleanseth his way, by taking heed thereto according to God's Word*, he may still do a good life's work, and be owned by Christ at His coming.

But, alas! how great, in every such instance, will be the danger of relapse! When sin seems to have been entirely put away, how quickly, how suddenly, does it reappear! nay, how close by us it seems to have been standing all the time! *Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?* Sin once admitted seems to have a sort of claim upon us: it returns ever and anon as to its own house, and rather demands than asks admittance. It has been said, and too truly, that a man's besetting sin will be such to the end of his life: it is one of the strongest arguments, could its strength but be felt beforehand as it is felt in the retrospect, against harbouring sin at all, against suffering any inducement to make us part with the integrity of an unstained life. He who has once admitted into his life or heart a definite form of sin, may cleanse himself perhaps from it for a time, may remain for three years or five years free almost from its solicitations, and yet again it shall come back upon him, in the thoughts of his heart if not in the very act itself, and he shall find

himself, if he ever relax his watchfulness, as much its slave as ever, and the house from which it went out shall have been as it were but swept and garnished for the hour of its return.

It is needless to carry the matter one step further, and speak of the dangers of a relapse in the case of the formed and matured habits of later life. There are two sins, more particularly, which have exemplified again and again the fearful risk of a return to evil. Of one of these I will not speak. From the other, the sin to which we commonly restrict the term *intemperance*, it is painful but not impossible to draw the illustration. Alas! how dreadful is our experience of it in the dwellings of the poor! What a raging monster is drunkenness! how utterly hardhearted! how dead to the call even of natural affection, even of humanity, even of self-love! And what a tyrant is it! how resolute its rule over the soul once enthralled! Neither entreaties nor resolutions, neither shame nor remorse, neither fear of God nor regard for man, avail anything against its iron grasp. How it exemplifies too the saying of the Book of Proverbs, *Wine is a mocker!* Now and then it seems as though it would relax its hold: the voice of conscience has been heard within, awakened by some dispensation of God's Providence, or quickened into energy by some conviction or persuasion of God's Word: for a time we hear the glad tidings that he whom Satan has so long bound has struggled into freedom: the home of poverty smiles again, and cheerfulness, if not plenty, is seen where all was gloom and wretchedness: alas! again and again even this fair hope has been

disappointed: there has been a relapse: the later darkness is more absolute than the earlier; the evil spirit has come back, as though with seven others more wicked than himself, and the last end of that man is even worse than the first.

2. We turn now to the latter part of the subject, and would speak of the danger of relapse in reference to the spiritual state generally, rather than to particular habits of life.

I need not say to any one here present that there is an inward life for each one of us; real and definite, though not visible; a life which we live towards God, and by which God judges each of us from day to day. If we are not conscious of any relation to God; if we can live without Him in the world; if, for us, the words faith and hope and love, as towards God, are unreal and unmeaning; all this does not prove us to have no inward state, no spiritual condition, but only to be in a state of the greatest possible risk and danger, a condition of living death, carrying about with us everywhere not only a deeply diseased but an actually dead soul.

We who are here this evening are not, we may hope, quite in this state, any of us. We have a spiritual existence, and a spiritual history, every one. As we look back upon the years that are past, we can see that there has been a thread running through them, connecting each with each, and all with God: we can probably, if we examine them, say with regard to one period, *I was then making some effort to be religious*, and of another, *I was then walking carelessly*, and of another, *I was then under a particular influence operating*

strongly upon my character in this direction or that: it is perhaps on the whole, for many of us, a painful retrospect, but not the less necessary on that account: there can be no repentance without a retrospect, and I think there is no retrospect which does not testify quite as strongly to God's patient love as to our perverseness and sinfulness.

But every glance cast backward upon the things behind, must have one effect at least amongst others; that of showing us the precariousness (humanly speaking) of the Christian life; its slow and intermittent growth; its liability to reverses and relapses; its exposure to innumerable influences and accidents; its wonderful fluctuations and its too frequent vacillations. If on the whole its course were progress; if, viewing it at intervals, we could see distinctly that we were in advance now of the position which we had attained then; the result would be less saddening and less discouraging. But I fear that many of us have to confess that our spiritual history has not been so much a progress with drawbacks, as a mere oscillation; a swaying to and fro; a pendulum limited in its range by two extremes which it cannot pass, rather than the hand of the clock advancing by a steady though almost imperceptible progress to the completion of its hour. This it is that makes our hearts misgive us when we look forward. Is it to be so always? Is every apparent advance to be made up for, as it has so often been, by an equal or greater decline? Is our Christian life to be always lived within barriers which at its best it cannot surmount? Am I never to get into a higher region of experience,

a purer air, a brighter light, and a more expansive freedom? We all know how to reply to these questions: we can all say, *Ye are not straitened in God, ye are straitened only in yourselves*; straitened in your own expectations almost as much as in your own endeavours. It is true, and we do well to remember it, and to rebuke ourselves even sharply for our weakness of faith and our faintness of hope. But we need also some serious counsel: we need at some times a very bracing, if at other times a soothing treatment: and I am persuaded that both for ourselves and for others we are all too apt to shrink from it.

I wish that for this night we might be enabled by God's grace to lay well to heart the few words given as the subject of meditation, *the danger of relapse*. If we felt this as we ought, it would lead us to take the proper precautions against it. And in the soul, however it may be in the body, there is properly no such thing as accident: our spiritual state is the result of influences the effect of which we can to a certain extent calculate, and which conscience, the Word of God, and the Spirit of God, will, if duly listened to, teach us how to direct.

Ye are idle, ye are idle—well might it be said to us—and then lay upon human infirmity, or else almost upon Divine appointment, the blame of a result which you could have foreseen and with which you are chargeable. O, my brethren, we do not take the pains with our souls which we ought. It would be a daily miracle if our bodies were kept in health without food: why should we expect a like thing in the soul? Which of us is not more or less guilty of starving his soul?

Which of us gives his own soul either proper food or proper exercise or proper rest? These things are all alike found in communing with God: and which of us knows as he ought what that is? O let us say to ourselves each morning, so many of us as have any fear or love of God at all, *I am at a certain point now, whatever it be, in my soul's life: twenty years, or thirty years, or fifty years, of my probation are ended, and soon, soon at the latest, my destiny will be determined: at present, though under the care of God, I am in an enemy's country: many things will this day arise which will try my faith: temptations will come, offences will come, and it is my business to meet and to surmount them: but, most of all, and at all events, I know that I shall be influenced by things seen and temporal to relax my hold upon things unseen and eternal: and it may be that from within also, out of the sins of the past, some definite root of bitterness will this day spring up to trouble me: it is of the utmost consequence that I should not fall, that I should not go backward: I am behindhand enough now; let me not, by my carelessness or by my wilfulness, or by my presumption, make my case yet worse: O let me remember, while it may yet avail something, the importance of overcoming, of standing fast, of not drawing back, of not relapsing: and let me now come with all my heart to Him who is able to keep me from falling, that He may help and protect me all the day: may, as it is written, hold up my goings in His way, that my footsteps slip not.* Such thoughts, carried out into their natural consequences, first of earnest prayer, and then of watchful living, will be our safeguard in the time of trial: God

will be in our daily life, and He will not suffer us to be greatly moved.

The subject which has engaged us is one of melancholy tone and sound: but every word of God has its bright side also. The danger of relapse is great and formidable: no one in this life is exempt from it. Rich and poor, high and low, learned and unlearned, old and young, all are in danger of sliding back, of becoming backwarder than now in the Christian race, of actually drawing back unto perdition. We hear of it from time to time as a danger realized in sad experience. We receive sometimes from dying lips the confession, *I was once what I am not now: in my youth I was converted: I began to serve God: I came to the Lord's Table, I attended religious and devotional meetings: I thought all was well with me. But I fell away: the cares of life, or the unkindness of others, or the discovery of hypocrisy in some whom I had thought Christians, or—it may be—perhaps, if we knew all, yet more often—some subtle bosom sin, insinuated itself and ate the heart out of my religion: by degrees I gave up my profession; I ceased to communicate; I ceased to pray; I went with the multitude: and I lie here a backslider; afraid and ashamed to lift up my eyes unto heaven; the source of prayer dried within, and the ear of God closed.* Such is the reality of the danger in its last and most fearful developement. But the sense of danger, realized betimes, is not a terror but a caution: it is given to us that we may be both warned and armed against it: and the same Scripture which tells us of the danger tells us also how to counteract it.

When our Lord had been delivering to His disciples the discourse which we still read in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St John, on His relation to them as the bread of life; and when, in answer to the cavils of those who would not understand, He had gone on into language still more difficult, and had spoken of eating His flesh and drinking His blood as the one condition of spiritual life; it is recorded that *from that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.* In their case, it seems to have been the depth and spirituality of His teaching which was the cause of stumbling; just as in other cases, it has been the holiness of His teaching, and the necessity of choosing between our sins and Christ; the impossibility of keeping sin and yet being saved from it; of being cleansed from guilt without being washed from sin. The effect is the same: a relapse from Christ's service into some other, whatever the precise form of that other service be. *They went back, and walked no more with Him.* Then He turned to the twelve disciples, those whom He had specially chosen to be with Him and to be His friends, and He said to them, *Will ye also go away?* Are even ye not to be relied upon? must I see you also one by one turn away, and leave me alone? *Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.* The danger of relapse was only a reason, with him, for flying more earnestly to the source and spring of life. To take shelter in Christ with redoubled faith and love was his remedy and his comfort. May it be ours! If we are in danger of relapse,

yet, remember, that danger is not an accident, and it is not a fatality: it is not a danger which need take us by surprise, and it is not a danger which must prevail against us. Say to Him whose we are, to Him who came to die for us, and who now lives again for us, *Lord, I see the danger: I feel myself powerless: O keep me! To whom can I go? If I turn away from Thee, I turn only to restlessness, to darkness, and to despair. Thou hast the words of life: O grant that neither the world, the flesh, nor the devil, neither temptation nor infirmity, neither neglect of duty nor tampering with evil, may draw me aside from Thee. Any one of these things is stronger than I: but in Thee is almighty strength! O keep me near Thee; keep me with Thee; when I faint, revive me; when I stray, recall me; when my faith fails, strengthen it out of Thy fulness; and, when some earthly idol would usurp Thy place within, give me grace to dethrone it, cost what it may!* So praying and so trusting we shall not be confounded. *Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but, if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*

SERMON VII.

THE SECRET LIFE AND THE OUTWARD.

GENESIS XLIII. 30, 31.

And he entered into his chamber, and wept there: and he washed his face, and went out, and refrained himself.

THE whole of that history from which the text is taken is a picture of human life. Not indeed in its details of circumstance: for the life of Joseph was one marked by stranger vicissitudes than fall to the common lot of man. But in its truth to nature; to the feelings of nature, good and bad; to the jealousies of nature, and to the selfishnesses of nature, and to the cruelties of nature; and again, on the other side, to the sensibilities of nature, and to the humanities of nature, and to the tendernesses of nature; the history of Joseph is a living picture still of man and of human life, and it will be read to the very end of time as one of the thousand indications of the naturalness of the Bible, as well as of the deep insight of God who made us into the wills and ways and woes of man.

I have selected for this morning's meditation one single point in this delineation of human life; the contrast exhibited by the text between the secret life and the out-

ward life of each one of us; between the chamber and the banqueting room; between the man whom God sees and the man whom the world sees in each one of us. I have not done so for the sake of a beautiful sentiment, or a poetical dream; but for a practical purpose, which I trust will be evident to all of us as the course of remark unfolds itself.

Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep, and he entered into his chamber, and wept there. And then he washed his face, and went out, and refrained himself, and said, Set on bread. Is it not a true account of many a life? Have not many of us, perhaps all of us at some time or other, had this double part to play; this weeping in the chamber, and this refraining of ourselves below; these heart's griefs known to God only, and this necessity of taking part, notwithstanding all, in the busy world of duty and of society?

The heart knoweth its own bitterness: and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy. There is a grief which can talk; but we never think of that grief as the sorest or the deepest. Most of us, perhaps, have or have had a grief of this kind; a grief patent and avowed, for which others could pity us, and for which we let them pity us. Of such a kind are the commoner disappointments of life, its obvious privations, most of its losses, most of its bereavements. With these things others can sympathize: they have known something like them: at least they can appreciate the things in question; they can imagine what it would be to undergo, if they have not yet themselves undergone them. In these things, if there be a weeping

in the chamber, there is no need to disguise it below: it is expected of us that we should feel them: not to feel them would be a sign of insensibility rather than of fortitude.

But these things, except in cases rarely fortunate, do not make the whole or the worst part of life's real sorrows. For all these things there is a remedy, if in all there is a smart: the assurance of a loving purpose in chastisement, of the benefit of a mixed or even bitter cup below, the prospect of a future compensation for life's troubles, of a future reunion with life's lost relations, is of itself not a nominal but a real solace under such calamities; and many, we trust, are they who find it.

It is rather to the thought of secret sorrows that the text directs us; sorrows of which the world, perhaps our nearest friends, know little or nothing in us; sorrows which however keenly felt in secret, must be disguised and suppressed in the company of others.

It is not necessary or desirable, even in the way of general description, to strip off the veil from such distresses. A very few words will characterize and classify them: and then we may turn intelligently to those aspects of the subject which are entirely useful and practical.

1. The trouble of Joseph on the occasion spoken of in the text was one of the heart or affections. There was a beloved brother before him, whom he had not seen for many years, and to whom he could not yet unbosom himself with the full warmth of natural feeling. The pent-up love was overwhelming: it could only be relieved by a burst of tears: he sought where to weep; he entered into his chamber and wept there. How many of those who hear me can feel with him! Where is the house in

which affection is not the source of some secret trouble? How many a sister has had her youthful years entirely clouded by the coldness of a brother! What anguish does God witness in a thousand secret chambers from this one cause—love, natural love, unreturned, unacknowledged, unaccepted! What pangs may be inflicted by a very little selfishness, a very little inconsiderateness, on the part of one fondly loved! It is easy for those who go out from home into the varied interests of a busy life, to forget or even to be ignorant of sorrows which have no such chance of dissipation. It is easy (to adhere to the same illustration) for a brother to think that he gives all he ought, discharges every Christian obligation, if he is tolerably obliging and good-tempered to the inmates of home when chance brings him there, and occasionally recognizes the tie of nature by a letter in his absence. And perhaps long experience, long patience, and long self-discipline, may at last make those acquiesce in this amount of affection, who find that they must expect no more. But to all young people in this congregation I would take this opportunity of saying very seriously, Be well aware of the possible existence in others of a tenderness of feeling which is not your own: be well aware of the risk of overlooking or trampling upon such affection: be quick to notice the effect of your conduct and manner upon those with whom God in nature has allied you; and count it a great inhumanity, and therefore a great sin, to allow either temper or indifference or preoccupation of mind to make you add one jot or one tittle either to the dulness of an uneventful home-life, or to the burden of an over-charged spirit. This on the one side; to those who have

it in their power to wound. On the other side, to the weaker and perhaps younger, to the sister disappointed in her brother's affection, and even to the wife wounded sometimes by a husband, I would say in all tenderness, and simply with the view to the promotion of happiness, Be not (for your own sake) too expecting or too exacting: school yourself to patience: be prepared to find less than a home here: learn to look higher for your rest; even to One who always loves more than we love Him, One who loved first and will love last too. Your trouble is a real one: loneliness of heart, unrequited love, is a calamity: God sees it, God pities it: but be brave, in His strength, to face and to endure it, and do not put aside, in perverseness or in self-will, that offer of divine love which in the long run will be worth all else to you.

2. I have taken one example of a secret sorrow, as the text seemed to suggest, from the natural affections. And it is but a step from this to the next example, that of anxiety about the souls of others. Here again, we have only to look round, even if it were in a comparatively small congregation, and be quite sure that some heart echoes the words, and that some chambers, even of our own, could bear witness to the severity of the grief thus described. Are there not, for example, some Christian parents whose whole life is embittered by a secret misgiving as to the spiritual or even the moral well-being of a favourite son? Do we not know such cases; cases in which perhaps a singularly engaging and endearing nature was alloyed by faults of temper, faults of feeling, faults of conduct, growing with the growth and strengthening with the strength, until at last they

are developed in mature life into some definite habits of immorality and of ungodliness? Or cases in which a wilful childhood and a disobedient youth has ended in a total severance of all possibility of intercourse; in which the only chance of recovering a lost position has been the removal into a distant land, where nothing from home could follow the exile, save a mother's daily yearnings and nightly prayers, and tears? Or, to take another example with which the slightest acquaintance with humble life must make us too familiar, are there not amongst us, even between wives and husbands, instances of a constant, wearing, never ending, ever fresh anxiety, which can neither be avowed nor yet calmed? What is it to see signs of incipient intemperance, or of intemperance returned to? signs of an evil spirit holding possession, or else of an evil spirit temporarily dispossessed only to return back with seven others? What must it be, not to stand by and watch (as a disinterested spectator might do) such a case, but to have to live with it, to have to be involved in it for good or evil, or, far worse—for love is not thus selfish—to see it creeping or hurrying to its own destruction, and feel oneself powerless to help or mitigate? What words could more aptly designate such a life of anxious watching, than those which speak of a weeping in the chamber and a refraining oneself below; a couch watered with tears, yet a face which must smile by day that it may not tell its tale? Yes, well is it written of such a sufferer, that he went out and refrained himself; held himself in (for such is the figure) as with bit and bridle, that he might not reveal, that he might not betray.

3. Unrequited love, undivulged anxiety, have furnished two examples of secret sorrow: the third and last illustration must be taken not from the heart but from the soul: and we must think of those distresses which come to us from the inward strivings of sin; from those restless workings of inward corruption, which make the life of so many one long toil and conflict. These too, these above all, are secret things. I speak not of sin yielded to and indulged: in this there may be little weeping in the chamber, and little refraining of oneself below. But O how little do they know of the heart of man, who are at a loss to understand the meaning of a weeping and mourning for inward sin! There must be indeed, in such a case, something of better desire, some longing after God's favour, some aspiration after the freedom of holiness. It is not the careless, the worldly-minded, the simply decent and moral, who can be expected to enter into these sorrows. But between the total slavery of sin and the perfect freedom of holiness there lie many long and dubious stages; between the dead sleep of natural indifference and the entire wakefulness of Christian maturity. All through that intermediate region the saying of the text may be realized in a thousand ways and degrees. More and more in proportion to the advance once made in the life of God, and to the extent of a subsequent declension from it. More and more in proportion to the keenness of the spiritual insight, and to the feebleness of the obeying will. More and more in proportion as conscience is strong and resolution weak; the sense of duty accurate, and the habit of self-government loose

and intermittent. In such cases, the chamber may well be a scene of weeping, though the life below and the life abroad may bear few traces of it. The sad condemning retrospect of sinful indulgence, even if that indulgence has been but in heart, and has not actually stained the life afresh with sin; those *bitter thoughts of conscience born* which *with sinners wake at morn*; the plain direction of duty, yet the experience alike and foresight of departure from it; these things recurring every day are enough to make life very wretched; most of all—the point now before us—do they account for much discomfort and much agony in that secret communion with God, which (strange though it may appear, yet with a truth beyond gainsaying) may still be maintained in some sense even by the unstruggling or scarcely struggling combatant. Nor is it he only who weeps, and has cause to weep, in his chamber. Where is he amongst us who does not in many things offend? Where is he who has not every night to repent of shortcomings, and every morning to dread his own unfaithfulness? All probably, of those here present—and certainly of the best Christians amongst us it will be the most true—have had occasion to go softly and even to walk mournfully before their God on account of the repeated inconsistency between their profession and their life, between the thing which they prayed for, and the thing which they attained. These are among the secret sorrows of life. We tell them not, in detail, to our dearest friend. We trust to his taking them for granted: we dread the certain inaccuracies of human confession, and we dread the possible flatteries of its

reception by man. These things are our secrets: but they exist. They make a large part of our own existence, and we have to refrain ourselves not to show them.

Let us hear the brief conclusion of the subject. It will have two parts.

i. To some—to those who need the caution—I would say, Do not nurse your secret sorrows. They are not fancies in themselves, but they may be made fanciful. Sorrows of affection grow by pondering. They are loud calls to work. If this world cannot be what you would have it in enjoyment, take care at all events not to miss its object. It was never given to you to rest in: that belongs to a different life; a life, moreover, which you will miss altogether if you do not apprehend the object of this life. Your griefs will not be allayed, they will be fostered, by hugging them to your bosom. Make up your mind, by stern resolution, that this is evidently not to be a world of rest to you, whatever it may be to others. Then carry your sorrows out: take them with you to the house of God; perhaps you will leave them there: take them with you to the abodes of poverty, of sickness, of misery; there you will be ashamed of them; there you will be half inclined to call them fancies, when you look upon those palpable hideous forms which are buffeting and torturing the mortal life of others. These people who are in the hands of want, of disease, of vice, of cruelty, have no time to think of sorrows of sentiment or of the heart: learn a lesson from them: it will alleviate if it cannot cure your griefs.

And even as to those sorrows which are in no part fanciful; sorrows springing out of an unselfish and a

just anxiety; still even these, so far as they are mere anxieties, can do no good: turn them from cares into prayers, and then they will be altogether salutary; salutary to yourself, salutary (may we not believe, however hopeless in man's judgment?) to him for whom you are in anguish.

Nay, even your struggles with indwelling corruption may be helped by the charge to forget (in some sense) the things behind, and to reach forth to the things before. To lash yourself for your offences, to prognosticate their repetition, if it stop there, is idle and unmanly. Call upon God, and there is meaning in it, and hope. Say to yourself, *I am not the creature of chance, I am not the sport of destiny: I am a man: I have a God: let me for this day fight like a man and trust in that God! Am I weak? yes, far more weak even than I know: but have I not heard that there is strength in God? Let me try. One day of hard fighting, of real struggling, will at least be bracing, if it be not decisive: God help me, for His Son's sake, by His Holy Spirit, and I will not yield without a struggle. While I lie here on the ground, mourning for the past, I am losing precious time: confess thyself, my soul, to the Lord: invoke His help as a real living thing, and get thee back to thy conflict: soon the night cometh, when no man can work, when no man can fight!*

ii. Finally, to stronger men, who have no such experiences of secret sorrow, whatever its cause and source, I would say, Beware of disregarding and despising those who have. Make room for others—make room even for the weak, the fanciful, or the morbid—in

this capacious world of ours. Live, and let live. Be tolerant, for Christ's sake, of moral feebleness. Be gentle, for Christ's sake, to the erring and the sinful. This in general. But, in particular, the subject on which we have dwelt says to you, and to all, Recognize the existence of secret sorrows as an explanation of many phenomena of character. Is the temper of one with whom you live less than perfect? Is there an inequality of spirits, is there an absence of mind, is there a heaviness and a silence, which displeases and irritates you? Be merciful to it. Perhaps, if you knew all, you would perceive in that bosom a lurking care, disappointment, or self-reproach, enough, and more than enough, to account for what you witness. The cheerfulness which there is may be all a self-refraining: the chamber may have a sadder tale to tell; of tears and watchings, of tormenting doubt or distracting fear. Respect what you see not. Jesus Christ bore our griefs and carried our sorrows: bear ye one another's, and so fulfil the law of Christ. In a spirit of consideration, of deference, of silent yet intelligible sympathy, of tenderness towards another's untold trials, of pity for another's undivulged temptations, in these things is the love of Christ well-nigh perfected: they who practise these things have learned of Him. And they who learn of Him partake also of His power: in His school you will yourself become *a son of consolation*: and sorrowful wounded hearts will take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT,

March 10, 1861.

SERMON VIII.

REVERENCE.

EXODUS III. 5.

Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

THE text is a call to reverence. I need hardly say how much that duty is dwelt upon in Scripture, both in the way of precept and of example. *Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire...Serve the Lord in fear: and rejoice unto him with reverence... The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble: He sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved...God is very greatly to be feared in the council of His saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about Him...Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob; who turned the hard rock into a standing water, and the flint-stone into a springing well...The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him.*

We must all have been struck with the feeling

expressed towards God in the Old Testament. What a profound awe! what a prostrate yet loving adoration! what an admiring sense of His goodness! what a longing, what a hungering and thirsting, after the knowledge, after the sight, of Him! Take only the example of him of whom the First Lessons for to-day and for some following Sundays contain the history. I know nothing more wonderful, nothing more touching, than the mind of that great and holy mediator of the first Dispensation towards the God whom he served. What profound humility! what entire and absolute self-devotion! what a sense of the necessity of God's presence! what deep submission to the stroke of chastisement for sin! what a single desire that God's work should be done, whatever might be man's portion! I can scarcely conceive of the mind which is not affected by the record of his character as it is incidentally disclosed in the Books which bear his name. And how noble a supplement to those records is that 90th Psalm, which is headed, as you remember, *A prayer of Moses the man of God*; that well-remembered Psalm which many of us have heard read over the bodies of friends and relatives, *Lord, Thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another: before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made, Thou art God from everlasting, and world without end...O satisfy us with Thy mercy, and that soon: so shall we rejoice and be glad all the days of our life...Show Thy servants Thy work, and their children Thy glory. And the glorious majesty of the Lord our God be upon us: prosper Thou the work of our hands upon us, O prosper Thou our handywork!*

My brethren, I must appeal to you whether there is amongst us at this day anything of this spirit of reverence. Where do we see it? Is it shown in our conduct? Is it shown in our language? Is it shown in our use of God's Word? Is it shown in our meetings for God's worship? Order there is: decency there is: God forbid it should be otherwise: but is there amongst us, even in this house of God, that deep awe, that heart-felt reverence which the text prescribes? *Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.* Translate this charge from its oriental form into its spiritual sense, and what does it say to us?

Some have laboured, and, as I think, foolishly, to reintroduce under the Gospel a sort of exaggeration of that local reverence which belonged rather to the Law. They attract attention by their gestures and postures, their bendings of the head and knee, in Church, and more particularly at the Lord's Table, and imagine themselves in so doing to be either exercising or else learning a spirit of reverence. If they think so, we would not grudge them the help which they deem useful: but we would rather point out to them a more excellent way; one in which they may walk unostentatiously and simply, and perhaps attain that substance of which the other is at best the shadow.

What is reverence? what are its ingredients, its component parts? What hinders and what helps it in us? And what are some of its blessings? God Himself aid us in the endeavour to speak in His name upon some of these points!

1. I need not say—for all agree in it—that Gospel reverence must be a thing of the heart. It seems to be compounded of two things; the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of ourselves. It is the contact between the sinful and the sinless. It is the access of a conscious transgressor to One who is altogether holy. It is the mind of a created being, who has also fallen, towards One whom he desires above all things still to belong to, still to return to, still to be with, and still to serve. I do not think it necessary to say more in the way of definition. O, my brethren, would that I could impress upon you my own deep conviction of the desirableness of this mind! How dreadful it seems that we should not all possess it! When the thought of God forces itself or breathes itself upon our hearts, how dreadful does it seem—I might almost say, how impossible—that we should trifle before Him, and trifle with Him, as we do! I am sure the remembrance of our Sunday worship—though it is perhaps the best thing we have to show in the way of reverence—will be a very bitter thing to many of us some day! O these wanderings—O these vanities—O these murmurings—O these idolatries—which seem not only to hang about us here, but really to be more at home with us and more tyrannical to us here than anywhere—what shall we think of these things when we look back upon them with eternity open? Do you suppose that Moses the man of God worshipped in this way? Do you suppose that he who said, *I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory*, and meant what he said—he who prayed, *Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us*, and meant as well as

uttered the prayer—knelt before God as we do, with the world all about him, with the flesh and even the devil busy in him while he prayed? And yet it ought to have been said, *Among all that were born of women there was not a greater prophet nor a more holy man: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he!*

I know that it is a matter of great regret and great sorrow to many of you that this should be true. And be assured that we can all feel for one another, and feel with another, about it. How happy should we be, if a few plain words spoken by a fellow-sufferer and fellow-sinner might assist any one (for is not that the use of preaching?) in seeking and cultivating that good spirit of which we must all lament the rareness!

2. The hindrances to a spirit of reverence lie on the very surface of our life. Things that are seen obscure the things that are not seen. We cannot help feeling earthly things to be very real. What can be so real, we all say to ourselves, as this work, this person, this house and garden, this bright sun, this fair world, which is here before my eyes? Compared with these things, all other knowledge, we think, can be but guessing. The reality even of the Maker is put out of sight by the thing made.

This is general. Then there is an early habit of inattention or of half-attention even in religious worship. I do not see how it is to be altogether avoided, but there is no doubt that children's prayers, and still more children's attendance at Church, must be, in part, of this character. The outward habit has to be acquired

before the inward, the formal, before the spiritual. Then there is no marked moment at which the child's prayers turn into the man's prayers; at which the inattention which was once a want of understanding has become an inattention consciously culpable: and thus, unlike St Paul, we do not, in this respect, when we become men, altogether put away childish things: we keep the two together: and the same man will often exemplify the sad combination, of an intellect mature and vigorous, and a devotion absolutely puerile and childish.

Irreverence is fostered also by everything approaching to unreality of expression in prayer. It is one of the many advantages of our Church Prayers that they are for the most part extremely simple, and (what is not less important for a mixed congregation) perfectly level to humble spiritual attainments. There is little or nothing in them which it is hypocrisy for a very humble Christian to use. An advanced and devoted Christian finds them enough for him, but a backward and very failing Christian can use them without feeling them unreal. There is something perhaps in the mere fact of their being prescribed to us which gives us confidence in using them. It is not so always with other prayers. It is not so always even with our own private prayers: we are apt, some of us, to use expressions which, if we examine them, we shall find to be beyond our mark; beyond the mark of our desire, I mean, and not only of our experience. All such prayers are irreverent. They do not express the mind of a poor sinner kneeling before his holy God. They are more or less the prayers of one who thinks wickedly that

God is such an one as himself, and can be misled by words, when the heart is not in them.

Amongst other causes of a want of reverence, I must not omit the mention of an excessive indulgence of what is commonly called a sense of the ridiculous. In moderation, that is no fault: it has many advantages: it keeps a person from many follies: it is often the companion of a very sound judgment, and of a great capacity for good counsel. But where it is allowed full scope, without a restraining hand of piety and of charity, a sense of the ridiculous may become a very serious fault and risk. There are some people who can see only the ludicrous side of things. Human life itself has for them no grave aspect. They can turn everything into ridicule; until, at least, one of the great tempests beats upon them themselves. Then they feel. But that feeling is then selfish. And the predominance of the other, the opposite feeling, has perhaps by that time eaten out the very heart of reverence within. A man may lie on the ground, and lash himself for his sins, and sigh and cry for his sorrows, and yet not possess one spark of reverence for God, or even of real consciousness of His being and presence. Reverence, to be learned at all, must be learned by effort and by patience.

And I may add one special caution with reference to the intrusion of levity into sacred subjects. A man's heart ought to have one sanctuary. Even if he is not yet a devoted man, he ought to keep just one spot in his heart as it were clear for God: he ought to allow nothing else to possess it, even if God has not yet

taken up His abode there. Whatever else he jests about, he ought to keep the name of God, and the Providence of God, and the Word of God, and the servants of God, safe from profanation. The letting in of common light upon this province; the admission of profane words or thoughts into that which ought to be a holy subject; is not only a decisive mark of present irreverence, but it is also a bar to future reverence: he will not find it easy, even if God should give him repentance, to recover the strength of his religious instincts or the purity of his religious regards. This is one of those ways in which a prudent man makes provision for future contingencies: he will not fling away the chance of wanting God hereafter, even if he can dispense with Him in the time that is.

3. I have said that we, all of us, more or less, mourn over a want of reverence. There are times when we terribly miss it. I am sure we some of us feel that, if we could only know what a holy awe of God is, we would submit patiently to a want of comfort and to a want of confidence. There is nothing so real as godly fear. It introduces us into that which is within the veil. A sense of God's reality, a sense of God's nearness—of His power, of His holiness, of His right over us, of His concern for us, of His future judgment—is the foundation of all piety and therefore also of all peace. How miserable, how consciously condemning, is the want of this! To kneel down, knowing that we are in need, in weakness, in darkness, in sin, and yet not to be able to feel that we are before any one; not to be able to find the throne of power, much less the

throne of grace; to lie there prostrate and grovelling, yet by ourselves—no light above or within to mark the presence, much less to indicate the will to hear—this is very wretched: and I know that it is no fiction, no fancy: it is the case with many: not only have they no Saviour, they can find no God: they have let themselves alone, they have let themselves drift and go, too long, and now they are being filled with their own ways and eating as it were of their own perverseness.

But God would not have even these left here, left thus. Reverence may, by His gracious help through Christ by the Holy Spirit, be gained—yes, regained. We bless Him for that hope. We do believe that He desires not our death but our life: O let us come to Him! We must practise reverence, as well as pray for it. We must always recollect ourselves thoroughly before we begin to worship. In private, we must, if I might so express it, meditate and study God's presence. We must not begin our prayers without trying to set God clearly before us as a living Person to whom we are coming, to whom we are about to speak. *When I pray*, said a poor person well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, *I tell God what He is, and what I am, and what I want, and what He has promised, and what He has done.* No account of prayer was ever more thorough. And for the present, think of those first words, *I tell God what He is*: I count over, as it were, the particulars and items of His character: I set Him before me as what He is: I make quite sure of my ground by a preliminary recollection of the almighty power, the boundless mercy—but, yet before

these, the living presence—of Him to whom I am about to address myself.

And then, everything which we know or can learn of God may be made a help to reverence before Him. We ought to reflect and meditate upon His qualities as they are set before us in Scripture; not only in a summary and combined form, but in items and particulars: we ought to make these things, in their full and ample expanse, a subject of meditation, so that they may impress us as they ought, and dwell with us, even as we treasure up in our inmost hearts the features of the face, and the beauties of the character, of some loved friend, never weary of recounting them to ourselves, and gathering from the repeated survey of the whole a sense of the reality of the living man, over which even absence, even separation, even death itself, has at last no power.

And thus we pass from that help to reverence which is found in setting God fully before us, on each particular occasion, as the object of prayer; and from that help to reverence which is found in the occasional study of His character and attributes in detail as they are revealed to us; to a third and last consideration; the help which a spirit of reverence will derive, above all, from repeated personal acquaintance and intercourse with God Himself. The man who is most reverent will be the man who knows God best and has seen most of Him. Where there is anything of unsoundness in a character, anything concealed and glossed over, anything of mere manner and profession and false appearance to recommend it, there, of course, increased

knowledge is fatal to respect. There the only hope for a person is distance, and familiarity does but breed contempt. But it is not so with true characters, even amongst men. There are those, and many, we thank God, are they, whom the more we know the more we honour: persons, sometimes, of less attractive form or manner, but who are true to the backbone, and whom the most intimate knowledge only serves to exalt immeasurably in our esteem. If this can be ever so with men, what must it be with God! The only thing that can ever make God less than revered by His creatures, is ignorance of Him; ignorance involuntary or wilful; that ignorance which is the want of knowledge, or that still commoner ignorance which is the rejection and contempt of knowledge. In proportion as you see more of God; in proportion as you extend and multiply your opportunities of deep and hearty converse with Him; in proportion as you add a little (with a loving and earnest heart) to the length or the frequency of your daily times of prayer; in the same degree will you find that you are growing in reverence for Him, appreciating more justly each feature of His character, and learning more happily to harmonize each with each.

4. I end with two brief remarks.

Reverence is the pervading tone of heaven. It predominates over every other characteristic, save love alone. And even love itself needs reverence to solemnize without chilling it. *I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered*

his feet, and with twain he did fly. Four wings for reverence, but two for flight! It is a true parable. Reverence for unworthy objects is the curse of earth: reverence for Him who deserves it all is the very perfection of heaven.

Lastly, reverence was characteristic on earth of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. What an awe of God filled and sometimes overwhelmed His soul! Trust, obedience, submission, love, unwearied zeal, unwearied prayer—yet, amongst and above all these, what a paramount and pervading reverence! *Father—my Father—my Father which is in heaven—your heavenly Father—my Father and your Father, my God and your God—* what a tone of reverence breathes in the very sounds! In His recorded words addressed to the Father; in His sense of the necessity of repeated and prolonged intercourse with His Father; in those long nights of prayer in the desert or on the mountain, after long days of toil in the city or by the way; what a token do we see, what an infallible sign, of reverence and godly awe! Well might it be written of Him, that *in the days of His flesh He offered up supplications and prayers with strong crying and tears, and was heard in that He feared—heard* (as it might be given) *for His reverence.* Now He has gone back into the invisible, the inaccessible glory: and it is ours to approach Him with the same reverence with which He on earth approached God. *That all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father...He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father, which hath sent Him.* Now the earlier adoration, *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which*

was, and is, and is to come, is supplemented and completed by the ampler doxology of the Gospel, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT,

March 17, 1861.

SERMON IX.

FAMILY PRAYER.

I SAMUEL II. 30.

Them that honour me I will honour.

THIS is God's rule. Them that honour Him He will honour. Let a man make it his object in life, to bring to God all the honour that he can; to show that he remembers Him and regards Him and reverences Him, even when it is not likely to be noticed, even when it is inconvenient to himself, even when there might be many excuses found for postponing, omitting, or forgetting it; let a man live thus, and God who is thus honoured by him will in turn, as it is here written, honour him. He will cause men to see that a life of remembering God is, on the whole, in the long run, a happy life and a successful life and an honoured life. In early years such a man may have gone through much: he may have been overlooked, he may have been passed by, he may have been despised; or again, he may have been pointed at, he may have been opposed, he may have been ridiculed: but, let him have held on his way quietly and stedfastly, let him

have held his principles firmly, spoken the truth in love, and above all things kept manfully to his great object, that of bringing to God Himself all the honour that he can; and you will find that the path of that man has been ever a smoothing and brightening path; whatever his youth may have been, his mature age has been respected, his hoar hairs honoured, and his dying day bewailed. *Them that honour me I will honour.*

And we all know how the opposite half of the truth has been made good in every generation. *They that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.* There are those whose whole life has been one continued despising of God. They have gone on as though it were quite certain that no one of God's words was true. They have lived as if this world were all. And not only so, but as if, even with regard to this world, even with regard to such happiness as can be found below, God knew nothing, and might be entirely disregarded without fear of consequences. To what particular acts of folly or disobedience they may have surrendered themselves, is of less moment: that has depended upon a thousand things; inclination, influence, rank, wealth, companions, circumstances: but one thing has not varied: they have disregarded God, they have practically despised God: they have said in their hearts, either that He cared not, or that He knew not, or that He was not, and have lived from day to day on that supposition, on that principle. Has not the advancing life, has not the old age, has not the death-bed, has not the memory, of those men, proved, over and over

again, the truth of the saying, *They that despise me shall be lightly esteemed?* Has not the respect of men been found to a remarkable degree to come and to go along with the approval of God? Not uniformly, not perfectly; or the judgment of human actions would be present, not future; exercised by the world that is, instead of waiting for the world that shall be. But still, when we read in Scripture of sinners awakening from the dust of the earth to shame and everlasting contempt, do we not feel that there is a foretaste for them of that contempt below? that, even in this life, there is an instalment of despite for them that have despised God, and an anticipation at least of that shame which is hereafter to be the portion of those who have here been ashamed of Christ.

These remarks are perhaps too general to have found their way into the conscience. I proceed to a special application of the subject, for the sake of which I have chosen it from one of the Lessons for the day. The topic of my Sermon this morning is Family Prayer. I have reason to fear that it is one which will come home to some hearts in this congregation with reproof and conviction. Let them not therefore cast it from them. Let them listen seriously to the few words now to be spoken, and, according as they shall judge, so let them act. God grant us all grace to listen in this practical, honest, and earnest spirit!

I need not spend a moment in explaining what is meant by the words, Family Prayer. They mean that prayer which is offered to God by an assembled family or household. Such devotion occupies an intermediate

place between private and public worship. It partakes in some degree of the character of either. It is carried on at home, but not in the chamber: it is carried on with others, yet not in the congregation. It has about it much of seclusion, but it aims not at secrecy. The worshippers are not all of one age, or capacity, or station, or descent: but they have all something in common: they form together one household, one society, one community, combined together partly by ties of nature, and partly by those of service required and service rendered. It is a great mistake to suppose that the union of a family, even with reference to those members of it who are not made so by birth, is a slight or feeble bond. It is a connection, not only of mutual advantage, but also, where it is rightly understood, of great kindness and of strong attachment. When a united family kneels down to pray to God—parents and children, master and apprentices, mistress and servants, together—it is not a mere collection of isolated units: there is a reality in the connection, there is a unity in the aggregation, and therefore also there is a meaning in the worship incommunicable to any other.

I may take it for granted, further, that family worship has its well understood and (in all main features) uniform course. The reading of some portion of God's Word, with or without comment; and then a prayer read or uttered aloud, either from the heart of the master of the family, or from our Church Prayer-Book, or some other manual of devotion such as is everywhere to be met with; this is the common order of

such worship, and, however it may differ or vary in its details, its general tenor may be assumed to be the same for all.

Now let me suggest a few plain reasons for establishing and maintaining this sort of worship, in every family.

1. And let me place first, as the text teaches us to do, this paramount consideration: *family worship honours God.*

We are far too apt, all of us, to leave out of sight this object of worship. We ask, and we do well to ask, What can I get by prayer? How can I make it most profitable to my own soul? *What shall I have therefore?* And prayer is meant to do us good; to bring back an answer; an answer direct, personal, and substantial. But this is not all: and perhaps I might say, this is not the highest office of prayer. The Lord's Prayer itself begins with three petitions concerning God, His name, His kingdom, His will, before it says one word of our wants; of daily bread, of forgiveness, of deliverance from evil. It is a very great and a very high object to keep up the remembrance of God upon earth: to see that each member of every family, however much he may neglect private prayer, shall yet be reminded of God's reality and of God's truth every day: to provide that in every home (if it might be so) in a particular parish or town there should be, as it were, an altar built to no unknown God, and the fire of a periodical sacrifice kindled upon it in the sight of all who dwell therein. Family worship is an honour due to God from those who are living together

upon His bounties, and who, collectively as well as individually, have a state and a life before Him. When the bell rings for worship at the appointed time, breaking off other occupations, and silencing other sounds, we recognize in it a voice which says to us, *God is, and is your God: Christ is, and is your Lord and your Saviour: the Holy Spirit is, and is your Sanctifier and your Comforter.* Thus, if not otherwise, twice in each day, is the call of conscience made audible to the careless, and the reality of things unseen proclaimed to men tied and bound by the material and the temporal.

2. Again, *family worship elevates and consecrates and (in one word) Christianizes family life.*

What a poor thing, taken in itself, is the work which fills our day! I will put aside now the thought of a statesman's life, which may seem to be really engaged in great matters, and the thought of a clergyman's life, which has to do directly and constantly, so far as its great object is concerned, with the souls of men. I will speak rather of the occupations of business (commonly so called) for men, and of household affairs for women. What an expenditure of time and thought, of capacities and abilities, upon subjects trivial, transitory, perishable! Which of these things will be of importance, which of these things will be in existence, ten years, or perhaps ten days, hence? And yet they must be done. Much depends, for present comfort and for present well-being, upon a punctual discharge of worldly business, and upon the conveniences and decencies of a nicely ordered home. Let no man despise the occupations of a man of business or of a

domestic woman. In these things we live: only a fool despises them. But yet, my brethren, but yet, how poor, if this were all! if there were no God for the soul to serve in these things, or no future world for which this is but the porch and the vestibule! Now in family prayer this background of faith is made for the time the foreground. When those who have been toiling through their little, carnal, domestic duties, sit together to hear a portion of God's Holy Word read, and then kneel together to ask for His forgiveness, His help, His blessing, and His Holy Spirit, how are they reminded of the elevating and consecrating principle which pervades, or ought to pervade, human life in all its parts! how are they reconciled to common duties, when they see above, behind, or within each, that thing which makes the mean great, the common sacred, and the earthly heavenly! how cheerfully do they go forth again to the appointed tasks of time, in the sure and certain hope of an immortality of rest, of blessedness, and of glory!

And there is another point also. Who that has lived, as all have lived at some time, in a family, can be unaware of the various little jars and collisions which the coexistence in one household of various tastes, tempers, and characters must necessarily, constituted as we are, involve? Every day brings with it some experience, expected or unexpected, because old or new, of contrarieties of wish and will between different inmates of one home, which must either be endured by an effort of principle, or combated with discomfort, dissension, at last perhaps with dislike and

enmity. It is only amongst persons very imaginative and very unreal in their notions of life, that family coexistence is treated as if it were all peace or all sunshine. It is not so: and, to speak of one important portion, more particularly, of every large household, its inferior members, its dependents, its servants, could it be expected to be so? Gathered together, in that case at least, from various quarters, to perform together a stated hired service, what is there to make it probable that all their likings and dislikings will be harmonious, or that, if not so, they will feel pleasure in sacrificing their own to another's? We expect too much in looking for these things to come naturally. We ought to recognize the difficulty, and in a Christian spirit to meet it. And again I would ask, What expedient is so likely by God's blessing to operate powerfully towards the Christianizing of a family—for that is what we mean when we speak of diffusing a spirit of kindness and mutual forbearance throughout it—as that gathering together, night and morning, before the throne of a common Father, in the name of a common Saviour, and with prayer for the inward grace of a common Spirit? Often, as they there kneel, will those who have a little forgotten themselves (as we speak) towards one another feel themselves to be silently reconciled, and some early opportunity will be seized of performing one of those little acts of mutual kindness which are often the pledge, better than words, of a restored harmony and a forgiving spirit.

3. I will add a third reason. *Family worship has God's promise, and will draw down God's blessing.*

It is not only an honouring of God, and it is not only beneficial in what may be called its indirect effects upon the social life of a household, but it is itself an act of real communication with God, commanded by Him, and sure of His blessing.

Wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, there is He in the midst of them. That which is taken for granted with regard to private prayer is expressly promised and asserted of social prayer; as though it needed a stronger encouragement, or as though (might we not almost say it?) it were in itself a yet higher act of faith. Let us never lose sight of the direct effects of prayer in the indirect. Prayer has a thousand minor and collateral uses: but it has one primary meaning, and one definite object. It asks for something; and it expects an answer. Even thus it is with the particular mode of prayer which is now before us. If family prayer is worth anything, either as an honour to God, or in its influence upon a household, it must be because it is prayer; not only a thing bearing that name; not the repetition of a few lifeless sounds, as a propriety and a decency, at certain stated hours, by a family calling itself Christian; but the confession of real sins, the avowal of real wants, the outpouring of real desires, to a God believed in and revered, through a Saviour known by those who are present, and trusted in. It is not altogether unnecessary, I well know, to enforce strongly this obvious consideration. The direct object of family prayer is, God's blessing. O who shall measure the full compass of that brief phrase—God's blessing? Who

does not know the difference between wealth and God's blessing? between prosperity and God's blessing? between domestic love and God's blessing? To feel, within the limits of one's own home, that God's blessing dwells there; that He in whom, whether as friend or foe, we must live and move and have our being, is not an enemy but a Friend; that whatever we have, His smile rests upon it; whatever we do, He precedes and follows it, He approves and He prospers it; that the life which is lived within the sacred precincts of home is a life crowned with His favour, and therefore sweet, therefore happy; this indeed is a comfort worth praying for, and this is that which family prayer daily invokes, and which (I fear we must add) without family prayer can scarcely be. *The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich: and He addeth no sorrow with it.*

I am firm in the hope, my brethren, that the mention of this subject to-day, as I know that it is not unseasonable, so will be followed by some marked results in the week which shall follow. Let it not be for nothing that your family will have heard this charge to-day laid upon you, that you institute for them an opportunity of united worship. Let it be a help to you to be aware that they will themselves expect it of you. You know that your conscience has not been altogether easy in the neglect of this duty. A little shyness—very intelligible, very natural, but still not to be yielded to—is all that has, for some time past, stood between you and the establishment of family worship. That shyness has only been waiting, I trust, for some outward appeal to demolish it. To-day you have heard it. Now there-

fore I will ask you to lose no time in acting upon the call. Life is short: sudden death is too common amongst us, to be called a shock or a surprise: set your house in order, for, very soon, soon at the latest, soon whatever be the notice, soon you shall die and not live. Do not have on your conscience any neglected or (which is much the same thing) any postponed duty. It will lie very heavy on you then. Do not have to feel then, that, in addition to any personal sins you may have to answer for—slackness in private devotion, acts of injury to your own soul secret or open—you have also to excuse yourself for an habitual neglect of the souls of your family, for having starved them by a denial of the means of grace, whether as ministered in the congregation, or as provided by yourself at home. These are thorns in dying pillows: take heed lest yours be strewn with them.

I anticipate many blessings from an increase of this family religion amongst us. I do not indeed confuse the terms *family prayer* and *family religion*. There may be punctuality in the one, and no life in the other. But, without the one, the other can scarcely be. If the family are not gathered for worship; if there is no recognition, in any particular house, of God as the God of the family; then consider how greatly you are aggravating the risk of the separate members of the family not worshipping God, not serving God, for themselves. Personal religion is a distinct thing, in some senses, from family religion: we can imagine a family in which its separate members served God in secret, but which nevertheless had no public recognition of Him: and,

even on that least formidable of all suppositions, we should feel that there was a want, a defect, a fault, in the community, though it was well covered and to a certain extent redeemed by the individual spirit of devotion. But how improbable is that supposition! It is very easy for a careless master to say, *I have no family worship, but I hope we all serve God equally well in private*: has that master ever seriously reflected upon the opportunities which his household enjoy of serving God in secret? Has each child, has each apprentice, has each servant, his place for private worship, and his time for private worship? Are you ignorant that in many cases there may be interruptions offered, by other inmates of the same chamber, to the exercise of individual worship? that in all cases there are temptations, strong temptations, to neglect it; work beginning at an early hour, and hours of rest too short already to leave much margin for secret prayer night and morning: and, when the day has once begun, and the tasks of the day have set in, and each one is hurrying to and fro to discharge household duties, or is a close prisoner in the shop or in the counting-house, with scarcely leisure so much as to eat, it is a mockery to talk of moments being spared for devotion, unless the piety, unless the charity, unless the humanity, of the employer secures them for all by making it a rule of the house that at certain times all shall assemble for worship? Then, while all other sounds are hushed in the one office of reading the Word of God and of prayer, there will be secured at least one brief interval, two brief intervals, in each day, for self-recollection and

for communing with God: and, if the hearts of any should wander away to vain things, you, at least, will be blameless: or if, on the other hand, the hearts of any should seize that period of quietness for a deeper and more personal self-recollection than the words which are in his ears, and which are designed generally for all, could furnish, still He who seeth in secret will accept the offering which gives what it has and does what it can: and yours, in any case, will be the happiness of feeling that you, by word and by example, have made that prayer possible which else would have been impracticable; you have smoothed the path of life for one who might else have missed it; you have drawn down upon your house and upon your heart that promised blessing, *He that watereth shall be watered also himself...Them that honour me I will honour.*

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,
June 16, 1861.

SERMON X.

WAYWARDNESS AND WISDOM.

ST LUKE VII. 35.

But wisdom is justified of all her children.

THE preaching of our Lord was extremely simple. Always grave, always reverent, always, in the best of senses, dignified, it was yet, at the same time, always level to human capacities, just because it disdained not to address human nature and to draw its illustrations from human life. Processes of husbandry or of domestic economy, occupations of poor people and of working men, operations of nature and of Providence, incidents of fortune and instincts of the heart, all were used by Him as illustrations of divine truth, and nothing regarded as too mean or too common to be elevated and consecrated into a vehicle of holy doctrine.

The context affords a singular example of this sort of adaptation. There the very games of children are laid under contribution for a sacred purpose. The pastimes of childish leisure, and the whims and caprices which are sometimes to be noticed in them, are used as an illustration of the temper and conduct of the

men of that age towards God and His dispensations. I beg your attention for a moment to the passage itself; one not entirely easy of explanation, nor always rightly understood.

Whereunto shall I liken the men of this generation, and to what are they like? It is as though the all-wise Teacher were Himself for the moment at a loss how to characterize the disposition of His generation. It is like the question which He sometimes put to His disciples before working a miracle. *From whence shall we satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?... And this He said to prove him;* to test the faith of a disciple; *for He Himself knew what He would do.* And thus in the passage before us: though He asked for a comparison, yet He Himself knew what He would say. *They are like children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.* We have tried all ways of pleasing you, gay and grave, and you would accept none. We played you a lively air, and you would not dance; a pathetic dirge, and not a tear fell. We offered to play at marrying, or to play at burying; we would imitate a wedding festivity, or else a funeral solemnity; you would have neither: so unsociable, so unaccommodating, so wilful, so crossgrained! Even thus is it with you grown-up men. You are towards God just what these little perverse wayward children are to their companions. God has tried with you all methods. He sent you one messenger, who was all austerity, all gloom: *John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor*

drinking wine: he was a man of the wilderness, expressing by his own garb and deportment the severity of the message with which he was sent to a self-righteous and a self-pleasing age: and you, instead of recognizing the fitness of that character, instead of being awed by it into attention, reverence, and obedience, instead of saying, *God hath done all things well, teaching as much by the demeanour as by the doctrine of His messenger*—instead of this, *ye say, He hath a devil*; you ascribe the isolation of the prophet to moroseness, and moroseness to possession. Again God speaks to you, and, this time, speaks in His Son. He adopts now a different channel for His utterance, and invests with a different character the person of His representative. *The Son of man is come eating and drinking*: He who comes with tidings of salvation, He who not only calls to repentance but offers forgiveness, He whose mission is to human life as a whole, that He may raise, that He may transform, that He may consecrate it all to God, must mix in that life: He must not summon men out of the world to speak with Him in the wilderness, but rather visit them in their world, and show them by His own example how they may be in the world yet not of it: He therefore *came eating and drinking*, mingling with men in those hours of relaxation in which yet more than in business or in devotion they speak as they feel and show themselves as they are. But with what result? Did those who cavilled at the austerity of the Baptist hail the more genial freedom of the Saviour? No, the caviller cavils still, and says, as he sees the Divine Teacher seated at the marriage-feast

in Cana, or eating bread in the Pharisee's house, *Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!* Thus it is, and thus it will ever be, with the unregenerate heart of sinful man. He has his excuse always ready for putting aside the call of God. If he cannot quarrel with the message, he will find fault with the messenger: if the words are undeniably sound and wholesome, he will find something to impeach in the dress or the deportment. Meanwhile there are those who judge a more righteous judgment. *Wisdom is justified of all her children.* The wisdom of God in each and all of His dispensations is justified, that is, recognized, felt, and owned, on the part of all those who are truly children of wisdom. The wise justify God's wisdom. They see that in all that He does He does well and He does wisely. They quarrel not with the roughness of the Baptist: they suspect not the gentleness of Christ. They see that each in its place suited the work of each. The presence of an Elijah would have been incongruous at a banquet: the home of the Redeemer could not have been in the desert. God placed each where each was fitting: and they who had gone forth with tears of repentance to be baptized of John in Jordan confessing their sins, returned to listen, seated at the feet of Jesus in the temple-courts or in the home of Capernaum or of Bethany, to the gracious words which told of life for sinners and of a God well pleased for His sake with man.

My brethren, I have thought that the passage thus brought before us in one of the Lessons for the day

contained some good and seasonable instruction for us who are here assembled before God. May He by His Holy Spirit bring it home to our hearts!

We have here a contrast presented. There is on the one side the perverseness, the waywardness, of man; his disposition to cavil at all God's appointments, especially at those which concern religion, revelation, and the soul; his readiness to complain of each as inappropriate, inadequate, inconclusive, or unreasonable; his proneness to say of each, If it had been thus, and not thus, it would have been more satisfactory, more impressive, or more convincing; I should have felt it so, and God, if He had sought my good, would have thus arranged it. On the other side, there is the sympathy of wisdom with wisdom; the kindred and affinity which exists between the voice of God in His Word and the voice of God in the heart and conscience of His creatures; the certainty that what God speaks, and the way in which He speaks—the persons by whom and the circumstances amidst which He speaks—will commend itself to those who are wise indeed, wise in the humility of a true self-knowledge, wise in the genuine insight of an illumination from above.

The waywardness of which our Lord here speaks is more or less in all of us. In some it is a prevailing and predominant habit of mind. We have seen it in its working towards men. There are those—and they are the torment of families—who are possessed by that unhappy temper which takes everything wrong. They are always imagining slights and suspecting insults. They can receive nothing in a simple, straightforward,

natural sense. They are always annoyed that this has not been done, rather than that. If they have not arranged a thing themselves, they can perceive nothing but faults in it. They give it to be understood that, if they had had the doing of it, it would have been differently and far better done. Without speaking their thoughts plainly, they wear a look of offence, which is far more trying to others than any anger or any censure. These are the wilful, the wayward, the perverse characters, as shown in human life towards human persons. But that which we all dislike, and feel the discomfort of, in human intercourse, we are all, more or less, guilty of towards God.

We show it in reference to all God's appointments. We have long thought, If I had but this, I should be happy. If I could but gain this one object, this one step in life, this one position or emolument or affection, I should be fully satisfied, I should want nothing more. It comes—it is given—the wish is gratified: do we want nothing more? O, behind the first reach of that mountain summit, there stretches yet another and another and another: to have gained the height which we saw from below, is only to come in sight of a second, and then of a higher still, and yet a higher: he who begins to climb must climb on, or he can but despise the earlier ascent which once seemed so important. Nay, do we not hear of something worse than new desires growing out of old attainments? Who has not known what it is to find the character of an object changed as we grasp it, and to pass from charging God foolishly for not giving, into a yet more sinful murmuring against

Him for having listened to our desire? The wayward mind is never satisfied: great need have we, even with regard to earthly matters, to say, Not my will, O Lord, but Thine be done! There are those who, in reference to outward things, justify God's wisdom instead of setting up their own. There are those who say, He has judged better for me than I could have judged for myself: this which He has denied would never have made me happy: this which He has given is the very best thing: it must be so: for has not He, my Father, ordered it?

But it is far more distressing, and scarcely less common, to see the wayward spirit running on into the affairs of the soul. It is impossible to conceive anything more painful than the feeling which some persons cherish as to God's treatment of them morally and spiritually. How often have we heard a young person complain of the strength of particular evil tendencies felt within, as though it were a proof of God's want of love, almost of God's injustice! We have heard that person refer in no submissive tone to the more favourable religious circumstances of another. Not only in reference to the superior character of parents, friends, or companions; to the better example daily witnessed, or the more abundant advantages of Christian instruction. No, the natural constitution of the character has been made a ground of complaint. An irritable or morose temper has been laid, almost in terms, at God's door. An excitability of temperament which makes certain temptations more powerful, or a languor and indolence of habit which makes all manner of exertion more toilsome, than is the case with others, has been expressly

charged upon Nature: and what do we know of Nature, save that it is God's order? Men have excused themselves for their faults by their faults. They have found an apology for sins in tendencies to sin. They have said, If I had had the amiable disposition of this person, or the cold temperament of that person, I should have had no trouble in being good. And perhaps that other person may be saying—you, if that regret or that wish of yours had been listened to, would probably have been saying now—If I had the energy of this nature or the fire of that, this indomitable spirit or that impatience of repose, I should not suffer as I do from the difficulty of being an earnest and a zealous Christian. There is no end to these things; these fruitless wishes for a different moral constitution, or these recriminations upon Nature for our faults and sins. It is not only that they are vain: it is, that they are perverse, and it is, that they are ungrateful. Each one of them can be inverted; and instantly would be so, if the opposite were our condition. These complaints from human hearts are ever rising into the ear of the Lord of Sabaoth, and they sound there like the caprices and irritabilities of little children, whose companions say of them that nothing will satisfy; the grave and the gay are alike distasteful; *We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.* The wise in heart view all these things in a different spirit. They know that no one is free from tendencies to evil, and no one free from hindrances to good. They know that in these tendencies and in these hindrances lies man's

earthly struggle: through these things resisted he must serve God; through these things vanquished he must enter heaven. They see also—or, if they see not, they can trust—that God has ordered the spiritual affairs of His creatures with all justice and judgment; that a principle of compensation runs throughout them, as through their physical and mental circumstances; that what is denied here is given there, and what seems in this point to be an unfairness of disadvantage is made up in that point by some countervailing preponderance of good. And if in some cases they can neither see this, nor see how it can be so, still they trust God's justice through all, and not only silence but satisfy the involuntary risings of doubt within, by the great elementary question, *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* For themselves, they are quite sure that it is so; and they acquiesce in that all-wise appointment which has commanded that their particular battlefield should be situated here and not there; in a character tending (as the case may be) to an excess of warmth or an excess of languor, to irritability or else to torpor, to sensitiveness and its accompanying unreasonablenesses, or else to coldness and its probable shortcomings and deficiencies. They know that their business lies with that which is, not with that which might have been: they set themselves in God's strength to do the work which He has made theirs, and not to imagine how, under altered circumstances, they might have done better that work which He has made another's. Thus is the wisdom of God justified by its children.

We approach yet more nearly to the original use of the context, when we add a few concluding remarks upon the perverseness of man in reference to God's revelations of Himself. The waywardness which is here expressly rebuked was exhibited in the manner in which the Jews of that time received the mission of the Baptist and the mission of the Saviour. They settled with themselves how God ought to speak, and judged accordingly with regard to that which He did speak. When He sent them a reprover, in the befitting garb of austerity and of isolation, they attributed to a diabolical agency those manifestations of the character of the message which he conveyed. When He sent them One who was to bring God's love into everything; to raise what was low, and to sanctify what was common, in human life, by coming Himself into the midst of it to show, not by precept only but by example, what it might be made; then they said that it was self-indulgence which prompted the intermixture, and that one who really came from God would never associate on equal terms with the earthly and the sinful. Thus, whatever God did, was just wrong. If He spoke severely, it was unloving and morose: if He spoke gently, it was a compromise with evil.

My brethren, there are those who judge in much the same manner now of God and His revelations. If He says what we know, or think we know, already, it is superfluous: we do not want a revelation to teach us that. If He says one word beyond what nature or reason might have taught us, it is irrational: the word must be brought to the bar of a pre-existing faculty with-

in, and whatever that faculty does not instantly ratify, must be condemned as a fancy or an imposture. One of the plain declarations of the Bible is pronounced to be inconsistent with probability, another with some human authority, another with the Divine justice, another with Christian charity: one is harsh, one is sweeping, one would lead to mischief, one is extravagant, one is unattainable: all these things must be cast aside as not suiting our preconceptions of God's character or of God's truth. And, as it is with the contents of God's Revelation, so is it also with the proofs and evidences of its Divine origin. One person does not like miracles, another cannot accept prophecy: one says, it is unworthy of God to suspend His own laws; another, it is unworthy of God to dignify human persons by the prediction of their names and deeds; a third finds nothing so convincing to himself as what he calls the internal evidence of truth, the testimony of his own conscience telling him of the goodness of the word spoken, or the comfort of his own heart in the exhibition there made of the holiness and the love of God. And what each one does not like in the way of evidence, he directly casts aside as valueless, and perhaps goes on to demonstrate to be hollow and delusive. Such is man's treatment of God's revelation. And if there be something, in all this, which is presumptuous and shocking; something which offends a sound judgment as irreverent towards God and unthankful for means of conviction largely and variously vouchsafed; might we not apply also to this subject the language now before us, and say that there is also in such reasonings something unworthy and puerile; something which may

remind us of the little children sitting in the marketplace, whom nothing can please, who are dissatisfied with every endeavour to charm them from their waywardness and ill-temper? What would they have? What can God say to them which they will not find some excuse for quarrelling with? How can He support His disclosures by such proofs as they will accept as satisfactory? We shall find, I fear, in too many cases, that the real dislike is to Revelation; that the real repugnance is to the idea of being taught anything from above; that the ground of the refusal of this and that as an item of truth or as a mode of demonstration is in fact an overweening estimate of the power and sufficiency of man; insomuch that, whether the heavenly music be gay or grave, it will alike in either case be unresponded to; whether the messenger be the Baptist, he will be said to have a devil—or the Saviour, He will be accused of companionship with the sinful.

Meanwhile, here also, wisdom is justified by her children. They whose hearts are softened by a true self-knowledge, and enlightened by a real communion with God; they who are wise in that wisdom of which the condition is humility, and the beginning the fear of the Lord; will see wisdom in that which to the caviller is folly, will recognize a Divine harmony where all is discord to the self-confident, and own an abundance of resource worthy of the All-wise and the All-merciful, in that variety of evidence which affords to different minds, and perhaps to different ages of the world, their appropriate as well as conclusive reason for believing. The very things which others calumniate are to them indications of wisdom. They see how the message of the Baptist and the habits

of the Baptist—the office of the Saviour and the life of the Saviour—are severally harmonious and of a piece. They see how exactly God adapts His means to His end, and His messenger to His message. Where they do not see this, they yet trust. Not blindly, nor in the dark: for they know Him whom they have believed, and judge of that which they discern not by that which they have already known. Thus they live: thus would they die. They cannot part with what they have, till they have found something better. They cannot cavil at God's Word, till they have discovered something more wise, more durable, and more supporting. When the question is put to them, *Will ye also go away?* their answer is, *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,

June 23, 1861.

SERMON XI.¹

FAITH TRIUMPHANT IN FAILURE.

ST LUKE V. 5.

Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net.

THE Miracles of our Lord are Parables too. Not that we are to lose the fact in the doctrine. Not that we are to say, as some have presumed to say, that the allegorical is either the whole or the primary sense of a Gospel miracle: each miracle is a fact first, and out of the fact flows the doctrine. It is because the record is literally true, that it is also spiritually instructive. It is because the narrative is true to fact, that it is true to life, true to nature, and true to the heart. It is not by deceptions and it is not through illusions that the God of truth leads His creatures into the light of life.

The history from which the text is taken is the account of something which actually occurred. The two little boats lying empty on the shore; the fishermen washing their nets; the request of our Lord for the loan

¹ This Sermon was preached also in Westminster Abbey, at the last Special Evening Service of the year, June 30, 1861.

of one of the boats ; the discourse held from it with the people on the beach ; then the command to let out the nets, the answer given in the text, and the miraculous draught which followed ; these things are all true, they all happened : they are as much matters of fact as is this evening's concourse, as real as that the sound of a human voice is now in your ears. Equally true, as a matter of fact, is that memorable incident which followed ; when Simon, suddenly convinced of the superhuman presence in which he stood, threw himself at the feet of Jesus, a man before the Son of Man, and said, *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.* Equally true is it, as a matter of fact, that he received on that occasion a reply which changed the whole course and current of his life, a reply uttered by human lips, but conveying a promise which it was beyond mere human power to fulfil, *Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men.* The after life of Simon and his companions was the acting upon that command, and the performance to them of that promise. Fishers of men, throwers of the Gospel net upon the world's waters, with results real and palpable ; results which have changed the face of history—have made a large part of the earth a totally different scene from that which it else would have been—have altered, have reversed, have inverted human lives, and stamped men with characters the very opposite of those which otherwise they would have borne ; results which have either endured, or else been constantly renewed and repeated, through long ages ; this is what the disciples here spoken of became and did : this is what Christ's word made them, and He has glorified Himself in them.

Very wonderful and very instructive are the lessons contained in this latter part of the narrative. But I would speak to you this evening on the one verse read as the text ; on the answer of Simon to the command to launch out and let down his nets : *Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing : nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net.*

Which was the more probable time for catching? Which of the two would the fisherman choose for the exercise of his calling—night, or day? the shaded or the glaring light? the stillness which precedes or the stir which follows the dawn? We need not to be told this : and therefore we can enter into the force of the words, All the night we were toiling and caught nothing ; yet now, at Thy word—though it be against experience, against custom, against calculation and expectation—at Thy word I will again let down the net. Thou speakest as with authority : Thy tone is not that of a mocker : if Thou commandest, I cannot think it vain : I have already seen something of the power that is in Thee, when at Thy bidding one of my household rose from a bed of sickness : yes, though all things be against it, yet at Thy word I will let down the net.

My brethren, Sermons have been preached, solemn, earnest, touching Sermons—touching in themselves, and touching in the time and circumstances of their delivery—on the two topics, *Faith triumphant in doubt*, and *Faith triumphant in death*. I would ask you to-night to ponder with me a topic, full of interest, I am persuaded, to many souls here present and open before God, *Faith triumphant in failure* : All the night we have toiled in vain ; we have

spread the net, and it has enclosed nothing; we have looked in the morning, and, behold, our time, our pains, our patience, had been thrown away; yet, for all this—notwithstanding past discouragement, disappointment, and failure—nevertheless, at Thy word we will once again let down the net.

The terms *success* and *failure* have a large range in human life. Some men are born, we say, to succeed. There are certain qualities which we feel to have a direct bearing upon the realization of objects. A clear conception of the thing aimed at, and a resolute look towards it; a just calculation of distances, and a wise allowance for impediments; a concentration of thought upon means, and a perpetual recollection of ends; amidst and above all, an immovable purpose, and an indefatigable perseverance; these are qualities, or powers, call them which we will, from the possession of which, in any particular instance, we confidently prognosticate success, and the absence of which we deem a certain prophecy of failure, in the race of life viewed only with reference to the interests of this world. And yet even in this matter we are but imperfect judges, fallible prophets. There are failures, even with all these gifts. Perhaps there are successes—it is just possible—without any of them. Nothing that man possesses can guarantee results. After all, *promotion cometh neither from the east nor from the west: God putteth down one, and setteth up another.* Circumstances which man controls not, changes which he cannot foresee, and chances which he cannot regulate, have a wide operation, wider perhaps than ought else, and under their influence it is seen again and again that *the*

race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; failure comes where success was certain, success where every one foresaw failure.

And no one can be insensible to the importance, for a human being, of the alternative thus described. It is a very grievous thing for a man to feel at the end of life that life itself has been for him a failure. No one can know, without experience, what the sense of mercantile or professional failure is to a man; what it is to have to confess to oneself that time and strength, the years of education and the years of activity, have been devoted to one work, and that that work has failed; that we have toiled all day and all night, and have taken nothing; nothing that was at all equivalent to the exertion used, the sacrifices made, and the hopes perhaps once fostered.

Happy are they, my brethren—and they are sometimes to be found—who are able to comfort themselves under the consciousness of earthly failure by the sense of a higher and a better success. If a man has found heaven, he may bear to have lost earth. But is it not true that failure has place also in this higher work? Are there no spiritual senses in which the words of the text are true? Is there no such thing as a toiling all the night and taking nothing, in the matters of that world which is of the soul and of eternity?

The history of the Church of Christ is full of answers to that question. What long dark nights has it had to toil through as a body! Have there not been whole periods in which its real work seemed to be going back rather than forward? periods at the end of which the condition and prospects of the Gospel must have appeared

even worse than at the beginning? And, on the whole, has not this been the true account of the cause of Christ on earth during the eighteen centuries of its warfare, that it has been, more often than not, apparently stationary; making no visible progress; taking no strides, certainly, towards universal empire; just holding its own by the patient labours of its faithful few, but scarcely seeing one new indication of the approach of the promised day when the kingdoms of the world shall have really become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ? And have not the great advances of the Gospel, when they have come, been irregularly and fitfully bestowed? now and then a whole country opened at once to the inroad of the truth, and then again a generation or two passing without one event which could possibly be called a victory won for Christ? These things have been: and we scarcely know how much of them we ought to ascribe to the order of God's Providence, and how much to the indolence and faithlessness of man. But of this we are sure, that the long toil of the night, however little rewarded, was essential to the marvellous success of the morning; as essential (we cannot say more so) as the faithful letting out of the nets, when morning came, in obedience to the special call of Christ. The attitude of the true Church on earth has ever been characterized by the brief words selected as the topic of this sermon, *Faith triumphant in failure*.

And how shall we say, my brethren, that the case stands now—stands for us? Are we living in a night, or in a morning? Are we of this generation toiling through long hours and taking nothing, or are we rather living in

one of those glad and encouraging moments, at which the risen Lord stands at daybreak on the shore of our sea, and says, *Children, have ye any meat?* and when we answer, *No*, goes on to direct us by His own authoritative and loving voice, *Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find?* It is not easy to answer that question. It is not for us to seek to answer it while we are yet among the toiling. But it is very important for us not to be deceived; deceived with that sort of deception which mistakes seeming for reality, and counts means instead of weighing results. Nothing is so opposite to faith as vanity. It is far better to be labouring in the blackest night, than to fancy ourselves gathering with Christ when we are indeed scattering without Him.

I hope that it is not thus with us. I hope that there is much, in the Church of this day, of that quiet, steady, faithful plodding, to which the promise is sure, *In due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not.* This, in every age, is the real strength of the Church. It is given to few persons, and at rare intervals, to have magnificent triumphs. St Paul himself, who wrote, *Thanks be unto God who always causeth us to triumph in Christ*, wrote in the very same Epistle of affliction, of anguish, of many tears, of a sentence of death felt in himself, of a restlessness of spirit in anxiety for others which forced him even to turn aside from a door opened to him of the Lord. The real work of the Church, I would say it once again, is done, in every age, by those who are as willing, if so it be, to toil all the night and take nothing, as they are, at their Master's call, to let out the net for an abundant draught. We think it a great thing—and no one ought

to despise it—to have originated some great enterprise of good, some new way of winning souls, some mission, perhaps, to a land hitherto uncared for, or some novel mode of proclaiming the Word of God at home. And it is right to try every way: we are far too fainthearted, and far too unenterprising, and far too uninventive, in this one field alone: *the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light*, and it is dishonourable to our faith and zeal that in the highest and grandest of all works we should be contented to go on in that drowsy and torpid spirit which in matters of business, of science, or of research, would be regarded by all as ruinous and disgraceful. But yet, my brethren, be we well assured that the condition of success in heavenly things is still, as it ever has been, not ingenuity, but devotion; not hurry, but patience; not self-confidence or presumption, but quiet toil, earnest prayer, and invincible faith. All can, by God's grace, labour through the night and watch for the morning: all cannot, upon earth, see that morning break, or hear the joyful summons to let out their nets for one last, one crowning success.

Such thoughts can never be long absent from the hearts of those whose office it is, whether in our own or distant lands, to be fishers of men, watchers for souls as they that must give account. It is theirs to spread the net upon the waters, ignorant whom in particular that net may enclose; ignorant indeed whether in the day of that final drawing ashore, in which the ministers shall be not they but God's Angels, there shall be found within its folds so much as one soul tracing back its eternal life to their instrumentality. It is theirs to spread the net

widely; and in prayer, in faith, in patience, to await its gathering. They look not at the agency employed: they desire never to be suffered (in the Prophet's words) to *sacrifice to their net*: they would rather toil through their night, and look solely to His blessing who alone can give the increase. God grant that that increase may be largely, may be abundantly, bestowed! Yet, even if it come not, faith shall still triumph amidst failure, still, at Christ's word, shall continue to let down the net.

We wonder oftentimes, and who can help it? that, if the Gospel be indeed God's, more success is not vouchsafed to it. And, though the reasons for its failure are not few nor far to seek, reasons wholly of man's neglect and indifference and inconsistency, still we wonder on, and in moments of darkness could almost suffer wonder to pass into murmuring. But this I think we can say—and, if it is no answer to the general question, at least it may speak to us as individuals—that it is but little of success which any of us can safely bear. Where is the man whose highest life is not something injured by success—whose soul does not prosper most in failure? Yes, my brethren, the remark has a wide compass: I know not whether we may not almost carry it into the inward as well as the outward work of man. But of the latter, at all events, we may say it; that then is a man's soul safest and most healthy, when he is not borne along on the highest wave of a triumphant success. Look at the life of one who has devoted himself to the ministry of Christ's Gospel. Do you suppose that there is no danger to that man's soul from seeing himself followed, listened to, admired,

by a crowd of persons assembled rather to hear than to worship? That, you will say, and most truly, deserves not to be called success: the object of the ministry is to win souls not to man but to God; and it is not until man is forgotten that God is found. But go further: there are men, and in these days women too, who have an evident power granted to them over the souls of others; when they appear, there is respect; when they speak, there is attention; when they reason, there is conviction; when they remonstrate, there is shame; when they persuade, there is change, there is obedience, there is reformation. Well may they thank God, and take courage for further conflicts. But do we not feel also that out of this power over others arises a risk for them? Is there not to be seen a tinge of self-complacency, self-gratulation, at last almost of self-confidence, in the very language of humility and self-abnegation in which they publish their successes to the world? Yes, indeed it is true not least in spiritual things, that *man being in honour hath no understanding*: we can all bear comparative failure better than marked success: and I doubt not that that faith which triumphs over failure is oftentimes a purer and a brighter quality than the faith which gives thanks, or forgets to give thanks, over success.

No one can overestimate the qualities which are demanded for a steady triumph over failure. Mark the man to whom that grace has been given. I have seen such a man in a country parish, remote in place, unattractive in scenery, uninteresting in every characteristic of its population. He came there in early years,

endowed with gifts of intellect, fresh from academical honours, and he established himself there deliberately for life. He was the friend of his people in health, their physician in sickness, their counsellor in life, their comforter in death. The Word of God was his study and his meditation: week by week, and day by day, he was unfolding its stores to such as would listen. For nine and forty years he lived thus: he carried his plan of life to its completion, and died where he had laboured. And yet that man never knew what success was. He had no striking, no marked, triumphs. He spent and was spent; he offered himself day by day upon the sacrifice and service of his people's faith; and yet he felt, all the time, that, the more abundantly he loved, the less he was loved. This never shook him from his purpose. If he toiled all the night and caught nothing, still his faith was proof even against that failure. At last he rests from his labours: and now, no doubt, his works follow him. No doubt, others are entering into his labours, and reaping what he had sown. So would he have it. He served a faithful Master, and he will be quite satisfied, when he awakes, with His likeness. Which of us, in the retrospect, cannot see that that life was a safe life and a blessed one? Dull and uneventful, monotonous and unremunerative, when weighed in an earthly balance, was it not a noble one when weighed in the balance of God's sanctuary? Noble, just because it was far-reaching and deep-sighted; noble, because it showed a wonderful superiority to the influences of things seen and temporal; noble, because he who so lived was able to say, and to act upon the

declaration, *Master, I have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at Thy word, I will again and yet again let down the net.*

And is it not even so, though it be in humbler measure, with all those who have cared deeply for the souls of others? Has not the parent whose heart has been deeply exercised with anxiety for the salvation of her children, found in that long watching, that fervent intercession, that occasional agony of apprehension, a seriousness, a sobriety, a devotion, a nearness of access to God, which might else have been distracted by meaner cares, or drawn downwards by lower attractions? There is perhaps no greater triumph of faith than that which has been won over and over again amidst the apparent failures of this anxious conflict. When the very child in whom earthly hope centres can be truly resigned into the hands of God; when the disappointment of prayer itself only makes prayer the more earnest; when a career of indifference, folly, or sin, while it wrings the heart with anguish, can yet be watched through and prayed through in the strength of an invincible trust in the mercy and faithfulness of an Almighty Saviour; then, even more than in self-denying works of charity, is the victory of faith won: and may we not believe that in the most unpromising case there is a virtue in that fervent prayer which shall at last make it effectual? that Christ sees in that toiling through the long night a trust which is altogether acceptable, and will crown it, even after death, with the very boon for which it waited?

But, my brethren, it is not only in reference to

others that faith in Christ has to combat and to conquer failure. And I believe that it is when we come to our own case that we shall feel, not least but most deeply, the truth on which we have dwelt.

Where is he amongst us who, looking back upon the years that are past, can count his spiritual history altogether a success? I should almost doubt him if he declares it so. The Christian life is often called a warfare: is that warfare always a victory? I know that it ought to be so. St John writes that a Christian *cannot sin, because he is born of God; that he keepeth himself, so that the wicked one toucheth him not.* Those are words which have caused misgiving to many a serious heart: how could it be otherwise? For indeed we feel, my brethren, that the Christian of whom such words could be spoken is scarcely one of us. We know that it ought to be so: we know that, if a Christian sins, it is because he is, so far, not a Christian; because he has forgotten his Saviour, and looked off from his God. But, for ourselves, what can we say? O, if the hearts of this congregation were laid open, where would be he amongst us who could come forward to claim the victor's wreath? I know better than to suppose that there is one here present to whom the sense of failure is not more familiar than the experience of triumph. What is our day made up of, but a succession of failures? What is *the time past of our life* but a long retrospect of defeats? Duties left undone; relations unfaithfully fulfilled; Bibles left unread, prayers often left unsaid and oftener left unprayed; a testimony for God rarely borne with the lips and often contradicted in the life; affections

set not on things above but on things of the earth; that is one part of the record: I do not suppose that any one will gainsay that charge. How is it with another? Sins, not of omission only; definite bad habits; unkind, envious, resentful thoughts; unkind, mischievous, irreparable words; yes, and worse things still than these—whose history is entirely free from darker stains? I know there are those who are so: let them thank God far more than themselves if it be the case: let them thank Him for a natural disposition, perhaps, which pointed not towards some iniquities: let them thank Him for controlling circumstances which have stood between them and some transgressions: let them thank Him for that diffusion of general light which in a Christian land makes some crimes all but impossible in some stations: but let them not fail to acknowledge that in them, that is, in the natural heart, dwells no good thing: let them not deny that in all of us there is the germ at least of every sin: and, if they have little of outward open sin to answer for, then let them carry the question further, and see how it has been with sins to which they were prone; let them ask whether, on the whole, success or failure in the great spiritual warfare of life has been for them the more frequent: and I shall expect to hear that these too find themselves condemned; that these too must look back upon a long night, if of toiling, yet of taking nothing; of incessant defeat in whatever was for them the spiritual conflict; of countless disappointments in whatever they did prescribe to themselves as their bounden duty and service.

My brethren, *nevertheless* let faith triumph over

failure. I know that every failure is a proof of the want of faith. I know that, if faith were present, failure could not be. But there is such a thing as faith, after defeat, returning to the charge: and it is in that returning to the charge that the test of our Christianity lies. A man who can come back to Christ, and say, *Lord, I have slept at my post—Lord, I have let my oars drop—Lord, I have often left my net unattended until it could enclose nothing—Lord, I have suffered weariness to make me indolent, and long disappointment to make me hopeless—I have done all this—but yet—even now—even thus late—I will, once again, at Thy word let my net down, and wait Thy blessing*—that man may have many faults, he may be much behindhand, he may be full of infirmity and of sin, but he has the root of the matter in him; he has a little faith, and according to that faith shall it be to him. That man knows something, however little, of a faith triumphant in failure. He, if he tries it, shall triumph too. Christ watches not for our halting but for our rising. It is not in Him that we are straitened. O suffer not yourself to fall finally—it has been the case, alas! with many—just because you would have it that you were not a Christian! Arise, call upon Christ, and be assured that He will give you light.

May His blessing, which is life and strength, be upon us all! He stands, as He stood of old, upon the shore, and asks us of our welfare. He enters, as He entered of old, into the little vessel which contains our fortunes: He feels for its frailness, He will guide its fittings, He will steer it for us into the haven where we would be. Hitherto we may have toiled and taken

nothing: but if, at His word, we will now let down the net, He will bring into it that which shall be sufficient for us, and man's failure shall be Christ's success.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,

July 7, 1861.

SERMON XII.

FRIENDS AND FOES.

I KINGS XXI. 20.

Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?

SOME of us may have read of battles in which there has been a mistaking of friend for foe. Whether owing to mist or darkness, to unexpected positions or to intentional disguises, assailants have been hailed as supporters, or friendly succours attacked as hostile reserves, and the error, on whichever side it occurred, has decided the fortune of the day, turning defeat into success, or victory into discomfiture. It is above all things necessary in fields of battle to be able to distinguish between friends and foes. And it is regarded either as a terrible misfortune, or (more often) as a gross mismanagement, if, in these late days of the world, when the science of war is well understood, and the dearly bought experience of ages has prepared men for all chances and for all manœuvres, any such error is allowed to find place as must cause a wanton sacrifice of human life and make havoc of the wisest plans and the most sanguine hopes.

Thus it is in the warfare of flesh and blood. How is

it in that warfare which is not carnal but spiritual? Is there in that warfare which is waged by the soul—that warfare on the result of which, for every one of us, depends hell or heaven—any such thing as a mistaking of friend and foe? Is it possible that any one of us might hail as a friend one who is really a sworn and deadly foe, or receive a true and trustworthy friend with the question of the text, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?*

We read this morning of a case in which such a confusion actually occurred. A wicked king had selfishly coveted the vineyard of a subject. He offered terms for it, and they were refused. Deeply offended and bitterly vexed, he yet felt that there the matter ended. If Naboth would not sell, Ahab could not buy. If Ahab could not convince Naboth of the desirableness of the proposed exchange, Naboth must keep the inheritance of his fathers, and Ahab must go without it. But there was a counsellor at home, more bold and more unscrupulous. When Ahab is lying on his bed, like a peevish child, with his face turned to the wall, refusing to eat because something has thwarted and crossed him, his wife Jezebel comes in to rebuke his faintheartedness, and to remind him that, for a king, might is right, and what cannot be got by persuasion may yet be taken by force. *Dost thou, she said, now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.* The rest of the sad story is soon told. By false evidence an innocent life is sworn away, and Jezebel comes back to her husband with the triumphant tidings, *Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreel-*

ite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead. Without scruple and without remorse, Ahab avails himself of the opportunity thus procured. He goes down at once to take possession of the now vacant vineyard. But God has looked on, and marked every step of the guilty process. God does notice these deeds of violence and oppression, and, if a man will not turn, He must whet His sword. He sends His Prophet to meet Ahab in Naboth's vineyard. The words of the text are Ahab's greeting. *Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* It is thus that sinners regard God's messenger. He is their enemy. He may be discharging a solemn duty; reluctantly, unwillingly, with great pain to himself, with all kindness in his heart; it matters not: if he comes from God, if he carries God's message, if he speaks the truth, if he loves righteousness, he is regarded as an enemy by one who will not be saved.

Human nature is not altered by lapse of years, nor by change of circumstances. This mistaking of friends and foes is inherent in us all. God grant us grace to meditate on the subject to-night, for correction, for conviction, and for conversion!

Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?

God's messengers to us are various. Sometimes He sends a man to us; addresses the sinner by a human voice, and confronts him, face to face, with the minister of righteousness. That is, in one aspect, the office of the Christian pastor. If he takes any pains to acquaint himself with the state of his flock—and without knowing its state how can he hope to do anything real and true?

he will find, in no long time, cases, patent and notorious, of actual immorality among those committed to his oversight. The frightful disregard, in a town like this, of God's law of marriage; the perpetual discovery of lives lived in adultery; of men leaving their wives, and women deserting their husbands, to form new connections; and the terrible shamelessness with which such lives are excused or even justified, either by the commonness of the example, or (in some cases) by the provocation received; these things constrain a Clergyman, if he would not shut himself up at home in a sinful indifference, to speak in God's behalf, again and again, to persons sunk in sin, and to warn them, as they would escape the wrath to come, to cleanse themselves, while they can, from that which is provoking God's judgment every day. But, when he seeks to do this, how is he reminded, in his own experience, of Ahab's speech to Elijah! What endeavours does he observe to evade him, to avoid his visit, to keep him off the subject! What an obvious reluctance to be found at home! What excuses of business, of haste, of an inconvenient time! What vague general remarks! What cold unmeaning admissions! What an affectation of unconcern, of self-satisfaction! or else what idle hopeless expressions of an intention hereafter, at some remote day, to reform! However various the form of the reception, how clear is it that the person addressed is determined to regard you as an enemy! How little are you recognized as one who has at heart the good of a sinner; who would fain carry comfort only; who, if he wounds, wounds but to heal!

Nor is it only in these extreme cases, where there is a definite cause of irritation, and a natural temptation to repel advice, that a Christian minister finds himself received as an intruder and a foe. Wherever God is not honoured, the messenger of God must be unwelcome. Not, indeed, if he will drop that character, and enter only as a complaisant visitor. How often is he tempted to be this and nothing more! There is such a manifest wish to keep him within these limits; such an evident anxiety to prevent his coming to close quarters, or being, in such a visit, at all what he is in the Church; sometimes such a nervous restlessness in avoiding topics which might lead on to matters of religion; that he is perpetually reminded of the conditions on which alone he is received, and made to feel that there is no real cordiality towards him in that which ought to be his true character, however friendly his acceptance while he forgets or lays it by.

Have we not seen the same thing in chambers of the sick, beside beds of the dying? There lies one who has shirked through life the responsibilities of a Christian: one who has been irregular as a worshipper, grudging as a giver, infrequent or unknown as a communicant: one who has lived to himself and for himself, immersed in this world's business, or engrossed by this world's pleasures. At last the end is come; or the beginning of the end: and the Clergyman who has been disregarded in health must go to minister to the sickness. Twice or thrice, perhaps, he calls without admission: the sick man is weary, or he is sleeping, or he is not equal to exertion, or the physician has enjoined quiet: at last, excuses are

exhausted, and without actual rudeness admittance can no longer be refused. But even then how little may have been gained! *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy!* may be the language of the manner, if not of the lips: hast thou taken advantage of my misfortune to disquiet me with unwelcome reflections? I know all that thou wouldest say: I have my own thoughts and my own devotions: why come to torment me before the time?

But God's messengers are not all men: and the chief power of the human messenger lies in his close connection with another, not of flesh and blood. It has been difficult to speak of the one without introducing the agency of the other. If the visit of a Clergyman, in the midst of sin or of sickness, has in it anything formidable, anything which can suggest the idea of hostility, it is because the thoughts which he comes to awaken are already lodged in the conscience of the sinner. Elijah would have been little to Ahab—certainly he would not have been his enemy—but for his connection, in Ahab's mind, with the remembrance of good left undone and of evil done. As soon as he saw him, there rose before his mind's eye the ghost of the murdered Naboth; the spirits of the Lord's prophets, by him, or with his connivance, slain with the sword; the remembrance of sins against God, and of sins against his people, which could not always be forgotten, and which had still to be accounted for. The Prophet was his enemy just because he was in concert with an enemy. The real enemy was not he, but conscience.

O, my brethren, who shall describe the ways of men towards their conscience? What a wonderful thing

it seems, what a proof (did we need it) of our fallen state, that we should allow such an ordinance as that of conscience to be a hindrance to us and an offence! The instinct of an animal is his guide and his protection: the appetite of the body is the stimulus to self-preservation: how comes it that that thing within us which was so evidently designed to teach us what to do and what not to do, what to avoid beforehand and what to regret afterwards, is, not trusted, not followed, not cherished, not welcomed, but disliked, disregarded, thwarted, evaded, at last dreaded and hated? What a proof not only of the danger, but of the unnaturalness, of a life of sin! If it puts us at variance within, if it makes us try to smother and to extinguish within us that which ought to be the very lamp of our feet and light of our path, surely it cannot be good for us, surely it cannot bring us peace at the last! It cannot be well with any man who has to say to his own conscience, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?*

And yet so it is. Once let a man break loose from God; once let him give himself up to his self-will, lead him where it may; and forthwith, increasingly, at last utterly, he will find his conscience his foe.

Sometimes conscience will say to him, in the darkness of night, in the stillness of solitude, There is a certain duty which you are neglecting. There is a certain trust to which you are unfaithful. There is a certain relation of life—the relation of a son, or the relation of a parent—the relation of a husband or wife, the relation of a brother or sister—the relation of a servant, or the relation of a master—which you are not

fulfilling but in some known point neglecting. Or there is some one whom you have injured, and you have made no restitution. Or there is some one with whom you are at variance, and you are taking no pains, making no exertion, nay, perhaps, actually refusing, to be reconciled. In business, you are not scrupulously honest: in conversation, you are not watchfully charitable: this man or that you have spoken evil of, perhaps needlessly, perhaps falsely. There is that poor person, known to you, whom you have failed to look after: there is that sick friend whom, in idleness or unkindness, you have shrunk from visiting. These remonstrances of conscience ought to be trumpet-calls to duty. We ought to thank God for admonishing us of forgotten claims, and bringing to our remembrance definite obligations which cannot be disregarded without risk of ruin. But is that our feeling? Who has not looked upon these workings of conscience rather as the stabs of a foe?

Even more is it thus when conscience does not so much awaken to duty as rebuke and punish for sin. There are sins, definite sins, upon many of us; far past it may be, or else perhaps quite recent; nay, possibly still lived in, still habitual. And for the most part we may be able, by long use, to sin, and sin again, and sin on, without very great misery. It is the tendency of sin to drug conscience. The most sensitive conscience is the most innocent: even we, when we were children, were agitated and tortured by the smallest fault in a way now unknown to us even after heinous sins. But the sleep of sin itself has its visions and its nightmares; its dreams of punishment, its anticipations of judgment. Never,

till sin has actually wrought death, is conscience entirely and always silent. Conscience is God's minister in life: after death it will be God's executioner. At present, it is charged with an office of mercy, to the most wicked: it is our friend, however severe, however stern, however alarming. Even in those terrible pangs by which conscience sometimes stirs to its very bottom the heart of a transgressor, there is a gracious purpose, a loving aim. Conscience is the voice of God Himself, saying to the sinner, *Why wilt thou die? I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth*: repent, turn, and thou shalt be forgiven, thou shalt be accepted, thou shalt be saved. But so we will not have it. We will have it that conscience is an enemy: in other words, that God, if He loved us, would let us sleep on, and at last die, in our sins; would give us our brief lifetime, uninterrupted and unmolested, to waste or to abuse it at our pleasure, and at least not meddle with us, not send messages to us of rebuke or warning, till the earthly day had run out and the long night of eternity had closed in.

But, if it seems strange that any one should count his own conscience an enemy, when he ought to know that the only object of conscience is to warn, to benefit, and to save, is it not yet more wonderful that the same feeling should ever be shown towards the very Gospel of grace, towards the Saviour of sinners Himself? We all think it a proof of unnatural wickedness, that persons living on earth when Jesus came should have been able to resist the power and wisdom, the tenderness and love, which were shown alike in His words and in His deeds. The names of Judas who betrayed, of

Pilate who condemned Him—of the chief priests, the scribes and Pharisees, who accused Him of encouraging sinners, of irreverence, of presumption, of blasphemy—are by-words of shame and reproach: it never occurs to us that we by possibility could have done even as they. We all agree to call Him by the reverent and loving names of our Lord, our Saviour, our Mediator and Redeemer. We cannot understand how, even in the dread of a Divine presence, any one could ever have said to Him, like Simon Peter, *Depart from me*. We read of it as an infallible mark of possession by an evil spirit, if the organs of human speech were ever used to utter the sounds, *What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God? art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?* And yet, my brethren, I repeat that multitudes of persons—yes, even of respectable, even of church-going persons—pass through life regarding our Lord Jesus Christ as an enemy. They are afraid of Him; afraid of what He might bid them to do and not to do, if they were to connect themselves closely with Him; and therefore they keep Him at a distance: they do just enough as it were to pacify or propitiate Him: they know that they will one day want Him: but they almost deliberately defer seeking Him till the late hour of a death-bed repentance.

My brethren, these are the *enemies* of the natural man, of the fallen, the sinful, the unbelieving man: God's minister, conscience or God's voice, Jesus the Divine Saviour. And let me say that to have these for enemies involves having many other things as enemies which need not be so. When adversity comes, whether

in the shape of difficulties or misfortunes in business, or in that of deficient or failing health, or in that of separation, loneliness, and loss of friends, then to each of these the man who is living apart from God has to address himself in the words of the text, and say, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* And yet his neighbour, ten times more troubled and distressed than he in outward things, yet, in the confidence of an unshaken faith, may be discerning in each circumstance of anxiety and sorrow the hidden hand of God, confessing that he not only merited but needed each stroke of chastisement, and assured that behind every cloud of a frowning Providence there lies concealed an unerring wisdom and a stedfast love. Most of all is this so when death approaches. O how does the worldly man fight death off! How does he put away from himself upon others each warning—and they are many—of his certainty, of his nearness, of the possible suddenness and surprise of his coming! How does he veil from himself the tokens of advancing age, and catch at every instance of an extension beyond the common limit of man's threescore years and ten! And, when at last he finds himself tracked and hunted down by the footsteps of the pursuer; when the weakness of age has made itself felt, and the sickness which must be final has at last laid its grasp upon him; can we not hear him exclaim, in the bitterness of his soul, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* thou who art to snatch me from everything loved or believed in, and to hurry me whither I know not, whither I would not? O how unlike the language of him for whom even death, *the last enemy*, has already

lost his sting, and who can even welcome his coming, however formidable in itself, as the means of carrying him, safely and surely, into the very haven where he would be; into the presence of that Almighty and All-merciful Saviour whom not having seen he loves!

Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?

Is there any person, or is there any thing, whom we ought thus to address? Yes, my brethren. We spoke, at the outset, of the risk of mistaking friends for foes. Human nature addresses as its enemy weariness and sickness, poverty and bereavement; shrinks at the touch of pain, and is in bondage throughout life to the fear of death. And fallen human nature, fallen and unrenewed, addresses as its enemy the man who brings with him a message from God, conscience which is God's voice within, and Jesus Christ Himself who comes to save us from our sins. Thus its warfare is wholly misdirected: every blow is aimed at some disguised friend, and every plan and every watchword is betrayed to some disguised enemy. What can come of this but defeat, rout, carnage? Human nature, and each several partaker of it, has an enemy: but it is just that one thing which counterfeits the voice and professes the interest of a friend. That one enemy is Sin. *We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* When we say, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* we ought to mean, *I am in the presence of a strong temptation:* we ought to mean, *My adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour, has come*

hither also, and he seeks my life: we ought to mean, That evil thing to which I am most prone, that particular evil temper, evil passion, or evil lust, which is, of all, the most potent with me, is at this moment soliciting me, and bids me yield even if I die for it: we ought to mean, Now is a crisis of the spiritual life: shall I fight, or shall I fly? shall I tamely succumb to this false bidder, who tells me that he wishes me to be happy, tells me that this thing is happiness, tells me that I cannot dispense with it, that I must have it, let who will forbid; or shall I boldly say to him that he is a foe in disguise, and that I will none of him? God help me to count him my enemy, even because he is His enemy, and to answer, in the name of God, Thou hast found me, O mine enemy: but thou hast found me watching, not sleeping, armed of God and therefore not defenceless! If Ahab had said to Jezebel, when she came to tempt, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? he would have had no cause to say it to Elijah, when he came to judge.

God grant, my brethren, that we may less and less have occasion to use the words of the text in their yet sadder sense, not of the presence of temptation, but of the commission of sin! O that bitter waking to the consciousness that we have yet again fallen, when we have to say not to the tempter only, but to the sin itself, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* found me, not watching, not armed, not praying, not looking upward, but careless, supine, self-confident, self-complacent, and therefore unstable as water, nay, even like the house swept and garnished for the evil one! Whose life bears not the impress of some such sad experience? Happy

they who still, even amidst much weakness, many falls, and many sins, yet retain so much at least of a Christian purpose, as to hate their own sin and count it their enemy! These, surely, whatever others do, will betake themselves to their refuge. These, surely, whatever others do, will feel that in God, in Christ Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, is their one hope, their one safeguard, their one chance of escape; and will be able, at last, by God's grace, not only to ask St Paul's question, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?* but also to answer it, in St Paul's words of gratitude, trust, and faith, *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,

August 4, 1861.

SERMON XIII.

GREAT THINGS AND SMALL.

2 KINGS V. 13.

My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?

SUNDAY after Sunday, in reading the Lessons taken from the Old Testament history, we have the remark forced upon us, How true is Scripture to human life! How entirely is the God of the Bible the God of Providence and the God of Nature! How exactly are we ourselves and the men amongst whom we move—our own hearts, and theirs—our own infirmities, and theirs—our own temptations, and theirs—pourtrayed and mirrored in these narratives!

Is it not so to-day? Read the account of Naaman the Syrian. He is one of those persons, of whom we have so many examples now, who have every blessing that heart can wish, except just one; or who are exempted from every trouble and trial, except just one; who are men, perhaps, of high position, of affluent means, of

popular manners, of talents made for success, and yet have one little ingredient in their cup, which poisons all the rest. He was *captain of the host of Syria*...he was a *great man with his master, and honourable*...he was also a *mighty man in valour*...*BUT he was a leper.* And with that drawback what was all else? Wealth, honour, military fame, what were they, with such a sorrow added? At last a ray of hope enters. A little maid, brought away captive out of the land of Israel, tells of a prophet there who possesses a charm even for the plague of leprosy. The news reaches the king, Naaman's master. He concludes that the powers of the prophet of Israel must be at the command of the king of Israel, and sends Naaman to him with a letter simply stating that he comes to be recovered of his leprosy. The king of Israel regards this strange request as a mere pretext for a quarrel. But, when the prophet hears of it, he recognizes this as an opportunity of making the name of God known, and desires that the stranger may be sent on to him. We can see the pomp and circumstance with which the visit is accompanied. *With his horses and with his chariot*, the foreign general, so great a man at home, drives to the humble dwelling of Elisha, and expects a reception suitable to his rank and fame. Instead of this, he receives a mere message, affronting in substance and affronting in manner, bidding him go and wash seven times in the paltry stream of Jordan. The pride of Naaman takes fire instantly. He had expected that at least the prophet would come out to him, and, with all the proper parade of invocation and enchantment, conduct the process, in person, of an elaborate cure. If

washing in a river is all that is needed, he can do that at home. *Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.*

It is at this point that the words of the text occur. *His servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing; if he had prescribed a long and a severe course of treatment; painful abstinence, or nauseous medicine; the pursuit of health by long journeys or difficult exertions; wouldest thou not have done it? wouldest thou have regarded anything as too burdensome or too wearisome to be endured as the condition of a perfect cure? how much rather then mayest thou obey him, when he saith to thee this only, Wash, and be clean!* The timely and respectful remonstrance, the rational and unanswerable argument, had its due effect. Naaman saw the folly of his anger, and set himself without delay to act upon the simple prescription. *He went down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God, and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.* No words and no gifts could then adequately express his gratitude. Into the sequel of the story we do not now enter: that might be the subject for a Sermon of its own. It is with the remonstrance of the servants, and the lessons to be derived from it, that our present concern lies.

If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How true is this even in reference to matters of bodily health! How often has a person suffering from continued indisposition, or from

some troublesome special ailment, refused the suggestion of a remedy, not because it was too severe, but because it was too simple! It is ridiculous to suppose that such a thing as that could do me good! Nay, so much is this recognized as an infirmity of human nature—this tendency to be affronted by the simplicity and facility of a proposed means of cure—that physicians themselves are sometimes compelled to humour it, and, even where they see that nothing is required but a small change of diet, or the application of some perfectly obvious medicine, find it necessary, nevertheless, to wrap up the case in a certain degree of mystery, or to compound the efficacious drug with a certain quantity of harmless but unmeaning adjuncts, in order to satisfy the patient that his malady is duly respected, or that he himself is treated with the honour due to his position.

How true is the remark also in reference to the life of families! There is a brother or sister, a wife or a husband, really devoted to the person with whom they live; ready, not in name only but in truth, to give all they have, to give their very life, for another; and yet they who can do the greater thing cannot do the less; cannot promote the comfort, in little things, of those to whom in theory they are devoted; cannot give up their own will to another's in small matters, for the sake of peace and happiness; cannot correct the thwarting temper, cannot stifle the provoking taunt; cannot, in short, make those little sacrifices which are required of them, though they would cheerfully make those great sacrifices which are seldom necessary, perhaps never possible. They cannot enter at all into the force of the

argument, If some great thing had been required of thee, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when all that is asked of thee is so small, so easy!

These things, in bodily matters, are innocent if foolish weaknesses. In social life, they become more important: the peace of families, and the happiness of individuals, is often wrecked upon them. But they are shown also in spiritual things, where nothing that is wrong and nothing that is foolish can enter in without real mischief, perhaps actual ruin, to the soul.

1. We see it in reference to the ordinances of the Gospel.

If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How many persons are there, sufficiently desirous of salvation to have been tolerant of a very burdensome ritual, had the Gospel prescribed it, who yet find in the fewness and simplicity of its authorized observances an excuse for disregarding them altogether! I do not doubt that there are many here present, who, if they had been commanded to perform certain acts of worship seven times in a day, to undergo great privations and make great sacrifices in order to accomplish a very wearisome round of ritual ceremonies, would have found in the mere difficulty of compliance a motive for obedience. There is evidently something in human nature, not only which is roused by difficulties, but which is flattered by demands. Let a man suppose that heaven is to be won by punctuality of observance, and he will count every added ceremony not only a fresh stimulus but a new honour. And yet the same person cannot be brought to regard with proper respect the

moderate and quiet services of his own Church, the humble instrumentality of preaching, or the two Sacraments which Christ has ordained. If you wish to gain his attention at all, you must add to these true and just requirements a multitude of others which rest but on opinion or fancy. He cannot be brought to see that a simple ordinance like that of Christian Baptism can derive any importance from the fact of Christ's institution, of Christ's command. He cannot understand how there should be any connection at all between *the washing of water* and the condition of a soul; between *the putting away*, as St Peter expresses it, *of the filth of the flesh*, and *the answer of a good conscience toward God*. If he brings his child to the font, it is in compliance with the world's custom rather than with the Saviour's word. He cannot see that the very simplicity of the sign is rather an argument for than against its Divine origin. If man had had the ordaining of it, certainly it would have been something more difficult, more cumbrous, and more costly. In the same way, he refuses to believe that there can be anything beneficial to the soul in eating a morsel of bread or drinking a few drops of wine at the table of his Lord. He asks again, What can be the connection in such matters between the body and the soul? How can the food of the body be in any sense the strengthening of the soul? He can understand that what he calls a good life, or even a devout and pious spirit, may be an acceptable offering; but he cannot believe—he will almost say so in words—that it can be a matter of the slightest moment whether or no he performs that outward act of communion which

nevertheless he cannot deny to be distinctly ordained and plainly commanded in the Gospel. If the prophet, if the Saviour, had bidden him to do some great thing, he would certainly have done it: but he cannot bring himself to believe and obey, when the charge is that simple one, to wash and be clean.

2. The same tendency is exemplified in reference to the doctrines of the Gospel.

If we rightly read the Scriptures of the New Testament, they tell us that the way to salvation is through faith. And they tell us further that faith is a very simple thing; that, great as its effects are, and great as its consequences are, the thing itself is nothing more than taking God at His word; believing that what He says is true, what He says He has done He has done, what He says He will do He will do, what He promises He is able also to perform, what He offers He is not able only but willing to bestow. And thus we find that, as the basis of all His dealings with us, He has made an atonement for our sins through the blood of His Son; has laid all our sins upon Christ; has made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us; has given Him to be the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. We find that He calls upon us simply to believe this, and, believing it, to act upon it: to act upon it by accepting, by apprehending, by grasping, the assurance thus conveyed; by receiving into our hearts the comfort, and the strength, and the blessing, contained in the doctrine of a free forgiveness; by throwing ourselves with our whole weight upon the declaration, *Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away*

the sins of the world! Now, when this Gospel comes to us, how often do we see it evaded! Nay, my brethren, let us look at ourselves: how many of us have accepted this revelation, and are living as forgiven persons; in the calm, peaceful, vigorous state, of mind and of life, which is the natural consequence of being consciously at peace with God through Jesus Christ? It has become almost the fashion to smile at this simplicity of doctrine, as though it were the badge of an ignorant and unreasoning party, instead of being, as I believe, the very hope, and strength, and test also, of the true Church and of the true faith of Christ. Many are they, both among ministers and people, who dare not take this truth in its simplicity: they must fence it against misconception, and guard it from abuse, by explanations and cautions and conditions on the right hand and on the left, until the Gospel of St Paul, and the Gospel of St Paul's Master, is drained of its very virtue, and has lost all its divine power to renovate and to save. And is it not thus also with the other half, if we might so describe it, of the heavenly Gospel; the offer of the Holy Spirit of God to all who ask Him? The words of the promise, as we read them in Scripture, are plain and express beyond the reach of doubt: but O how are they encumbered and overlaid by man's misplaced conditions, until the promise which a child can read has become a remote and an ambiguous possibility which is far beyond and far above, even out of our sight! And thus it comes to pass, that they who would have done some great thing will not do that which is less; they who would be willing to toil on under hard conditions, to go heavily all their days in the

bitterness of their soul, to walk mournfully and fearfully along the path of life before the Lord of hosts, if haply they might at length attain, by pains and cares and tears, to the resurrection of the just, will not accept the tidings of an accomplished forgiveness, will not close with the offer of a positively promised Spirit; and thus fulfil, again and again, the description of the text, *If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean!*

3. We may add yet another illustration; drawn from the requirements of the Gospel.

So long as a person is walking altogether in darkness, the demands of the Gospel give him little trouble. He heeds them not. They may be light, or they may be grievous, the commands of God are for him as if they were not. If he keeps any of them, it is by chance; it is because natural disposition runs, in that respect, for him, in the groove of right, in the track of duty. But when, if ever, he begins to feel that he has a soul to be saved; that God has a will concerning him, which it is life to obey and death to contradict; how often is it seen that, in the pursuit of some great thing, in the search for something arduous and something new, he loses altogether the duty and the blessing which lay at his very door, in his very path, could he but have seen them, and shows, unknown to himself, a spirit of self-will and self-pleasing at the very moment when he seems to be asking most humbly, what is the will of God concerning him.

Examples of this error are always at hand. We have seen a man, to whom God's Providence had assigned

some other work, some calling of common life, a business or a profession, innocent and useful in itself, but not commonly called sacred—we have seen him, as soon as God's Holy Spirit has really touched and changed his heart, become impatient of all common duties, and think that nothing can be called God's service save one thing, the ministry of the Word, the direct office of guiding and saving souls. With little aptitude, it may be, for preaching, with no suitable education, with habits of mind and life all turned in another direction, he has set himself, in mature age, to learn and to unlearn everything; just because he could not see that everything is clean which God's Providence has ordained, and everything sacred on which God's blessing has been invoked. Too often, if the ranks of the regular ministry of the Church are closed against him; if he is too poor or too ignorant to seek admission into the clerical office in its constituted form in this land; he will ordain himself to the preacher's office, and find in some unauthorized and disorderly mode of ministration that sphere which he conceives to be destined for him. Is not this because he is unaware how wide is the area of God's true service; how needful in common callings are the zeal and devotion which too often are thought to be appropriate to one only; how important it is that in the lay business of life there should be men of faith, of charity, and of consistent godliness; because, in short, he has not rightly attended to the counsel of the text, *If God had bidden thee to do some great thing for Him, thou wouldest willingly have done it: how much more when He only saith to thee, Wash, and be clean!*

How have whole systems of religion been founded upon the forgetfulness of this principle! Men have either gone out of the world, or sought to render themselves and others miserable in it, just because they thought it necessary to *do some great thing* in order to please God! What is monastic life in all its forms and degrees, the endeavour to escape from the temptations of society and to anticipate heaven by a life here below of uninterrupted devotion, but a neglect of the principle suggested by the text? And what is asceticism in all its forms and degrees, the refusal to oneself of life's simple comforts, the prohibition of marriage and the commanding to abstain from meats, the substitution of a system of self-torture for a spirit of temperance and of thankfulness, but a neglect of the same wise and wholesome caution, that what God looks for in us is, not the doing of some great thing, but the endeavour to be pure and holy in the performance of common duties and in the use of lawful enjoyments? And how true is it, in all these cases, that the easy thing is not always the small thing; that to some natures it is far more attractive to have a high thing, a great thing, a novel thing, proposed to them, than a level, an ordinary, or an old duty, pressed upon them; insomuch that he who would have exalted himself to the one cannot humble himself to the other, and he who would have buried himself in a cloister, or foregone every luxury and every amusement, without murmuring or complaint, cannot bring himself to be an exemplary man in life's common or natural relations, cannot set himself vigorously to that which brings with it neither applause nor self-gratulation, the fulfilment, as in

God's behalf, as in Christ's service, of the little everyday duties of kindness, of self-denial, and of charity, the careful walking in a trivial round, the punctual, loving performance of a common task!

Alas, my brethren, *the heart is deceitful above all things...who can know it?* When shall we have tracked all its mazes, or learned indeed to see ourselves as God sees us? What an amount of self-will, of waywardness, of perverseness, lurks in each of us! What a dislike of imposed duties; what a readiness to choose duties and to change duties, for ourselves! Who is there amongst us who simply enquires at the beginning of each day, What is that which God sets me to do for Him in these coming twelve hours? not, What can I find to do which shall be interesting to me, which shall be striking and pungent, which shall be important and noticeable, novel or original? but, what comes to my hand, in the course of that Providence which guides my life and which is God's arrangement? Let me say of nothing, It is mean, it is poor, it is unimportant, it is beneath me: it cannot be so if God's Providence has assigned it. Let me say of nothing, It is common or unclean; there is nothing religious in it, nothing sacred, nothing heavenly, nothing for Christ: this cannot be true of it, if God's Providence has brought it to me to be done. It is in the little things of life that God is, not least, but most honoured. He that is faithful in the least thing is faithful also in the greatest: it matters not in which of the two God tries and tests, employs and owns him. Thus it is that the apparent inequalities of life are redressed and rectified. There is an eye upon us, which marks the spirit in each

act: there is a judgment before us, in which the awards will be according to the motive. He who here has done God's will, whatever it was for him; done it as a man forgiven and blest, done it in faith, done it in hope, done it in love; that man—it matters not whether he had a great work, as man judges, or a little work, as man judges, set him to do—that man shall hear in the day of account the joyful summons, *Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful in a few things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,

August 11, 1861.

SERMON XIV.

ZEAL WITHOUT CONSISTENCY.

2 KINGS X. 16, 31.

*And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord
...But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the
Lord God of Israel with all his heart.*

IT is a melancholy record, which these Books of the Kings contain, of human character. One sovereign after another passes rapidly across the stage, to be dismissed with the brief but fatal epitaph, *He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done.* That is all that remains, in many cases, of a long life. There may have been power, and wealth, and martial fame : there may have been vigour, and popularity, and success : nay, there may have been the original elements of much good ; intelligence, and instruction, and conscience ; perhaps a childhood of innocence, and a youth of promise ; amiable affections and right impulses, and many lawful and proper acts : but He who looks on the heart in its source, and reads the life as a whole, and characterizes it (amongst many ambiguities

and many contradictions) decisively for good or evil, has declared of that man that *he did evil in the sight of the Lord*; his right acts were done with no good motive, from no good principle; the self-will reigned in him over the will of God; he did not deny himself to do good and to eschew evil; and therefore, when he falls on sleep and is gathered to his fathers, the testimony of his life as a whole has been against God and not for Him; he has done evil, if not in man's sight, yet in the sight of the Lord, and goes down to future generations not as an example for imitation but as a beacon for warning.

These cases are dark and saddening: but I know not whether there is not yet a sadder case beside them. When we read of characters wholly evil, we are prone to regard them as belonging to a different category from our own. There is an unreality in the conception of unmixed evil, as of unmixed good, on earth, which removes it out of the reach of an application to ourselves. But it is otherwise when we read of mixed characters; of a good man with many faults, or of a bad man with some virtues. Then we feel that we are in our own world again. That is just what we see everywhere every day. From such cases we can learn: and such cases are the commonest of all in Scripture. Bad men with some good points; good men with infirmities, faults, and sins; these are the staple of Scripture as a record of character, and therefore it is that Scripture comes home to us as it does, both for correction and for encouragement.

A character of which we have been reading in the Old Testament lessons of last Sunday and this, has suggested this remark. Jehu is not in any sense an interest-

ing person. He is presented to us as a sort of scourge of God to punish apostasy and idolatry in Israel. He is an energetic and bold man; prompt in action, determined and thorough-going, unfeeling and unscrupulous; well fitted for his particular work, which was rough and stern and sweeping, a work of judgment upon those who had sinned beyond mercy. But, though Jehu's is no interesting or attractive character, we must remember that he had a divine commission, and that he executed it faithfully. In softer days we read impatiently of acts of severity, even when done in God's behalf, or by God's command. We do not feel sin as we ought, and therefore we often cherish a kind of morbid sympathy with the sinner; a feeling, not only—which is right—of grief for him, not only—which is right—of instant tenderness towards his repentance, but even—which is not right—of dislike and disapproval of that suffering for sin which is either mercifully remedial or needfully retributive. The same God who now visits sin chiefly by its consequences, by those miseries which grow out of it and which in fact are but the sin itself developed, was pleased in earlier ages to punish it sometimes by human instrumentality; an instrumentality not more questionable, when God's command was clear, than is that of the civil magistrate who now executes a sentence of death upon a great offender. Such was Jehu's office, and he discharged it well. He could say with truth, as he says in the former part of the text to Jehonadab the son of Rechab, *Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord*. It was not here that he failed. His zeal for God was thorough in act, and perhaps sincere in intention. The fault was, that,

while he had a real zeal, he had no true obedience. He could enforce God's law upon others, but he could not obey it himself. *The Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart.* He had destroyed the worship of Baal, the open idolatry of Ahab and Jezebel: but *he departed not himself from the sins of Jeroboam who made Israel to sin.* He maintained that political expedient, of symbols of worship placed in his frontier cities, by which the first king of the ten tribes had sought to keep his people from being attracted back to the house of David in Jerusalem: he continued the worship of the golden calves that were in Bethel and that were in Dan, though he had broken down the image of Baal, and the temple of Baal, and destroyed his worshippers, in Samaria. And therefore, *in those days, even in the reign of him who had done such good service to the cause of God in his earlier years, the Lord began to cut Israel short;* and Jehu himself is handed down to us not as an example but rather as a warning, while upon his tomb we stand and read the condemning inscription, *Zeal without consistency: zeal without obedience: zeal without love.*

My brethren, I doubt whether in these days we are not in danger of too much disparaging zeal. Zeal is the same word as fervour. In its forcible original meaning, it is the bubbling up of the boiling spirit, whether in the excitement of some human emotion, or in the jealousy of

a devoted heart for God's honour. It is the opposite of an impassive, a cold-hearted and a cold-blooded indifference. It is the opposite of that disposition which can stand tamely by while man is oppressed or God dishonoured. It is the outburst of that generous indignation which cannot endure to see right trampled underfoot by might. It is the overflowing of that gratitude, of that devotion, of that love, towards God, which counts no toil irksome, and no suffering intolerable, if it may but express its own sense of His greatness, of His goodness, of His long-suffering in Christ, and draw others, by its example, to know and to speak good of His name. It is the glowing warmth of that divine humanity which would willingly spend and be spent in snatching but one or two brands from the burning; in turning, if it were but one soul, from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. This is what we mean by zeal. The zeal of Jehu was of a lower order than this. This zeal can scarcely be without obedience. It is inconceivable that there should be a real, an active, a self-denying concern for God's honour and for the souls of others, where there is no care to walk watchfully before Him in holiness. We have parted company therefore with Jehu and with his direct example, when we speak of zeal in its higher and nobler workings. Yet even Jehu may reprove. We all know what the boiling up of the spirit within us is or may be: but which of us has ever known it save for himself; in the assertion of his own rights, in the vindication of his own honour? Which of us, I repeat the question, knows the ebullition of a righteous indignation in behalf of other men, or of a pious earnestness in the cause of God? Would to God,

my brethren, that we saw more of this, that we felt more of it! It is a great sorrow and a great shame to us, that we know it so little. It is our daily complaint against ourselves, that we are so little stirred to emotion by the sight and hearing of sin, so little roused to eagerness by the thought of what God has done for us, and of the way in which man neglects and despises Him. O let us pray more for zeal! We are becoming too much used to sin. We are learning to treat it as a thing which must be. We are losing heart and losing hope in striving with it. We are acquiescing in sin and its consequences as necessary evils, instead of facing it in the name of God; instead of mourning over it as a raging plague, and instead of going forth, as Christians, into the midst of it, to stand as it were between the dead and the living till that plague be stayed. I would to God that there were more of us—must I say, that there were any of us—who could say in any true sense, like Jehu, *Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord!* Any zeal for God, even an ignorant, even a mistaken, even a rash zeal, were better far for us than none.

Instead of it, what have we? What is there in the world or in the Church now which approaches even remotely to the grace of zeal? It is scarcely possible to answer that question seriously. We have established for ourselves a moral law by which we regulate ourselves and by which we judge others. Need I say that our law—the law, I mean, by which society acts and judges in a Christian country,—differs very widely from God's law? We have one law of morality for men, and another law for women. We have not only degrees of penalty for de-

degrees of departure from the law of God, but we treat some departures from the law of God as altogether venial, and only some as heinous or reprehensible. There are some sins which only a clergyman has to be ashamed of: the Christian community (so called) has transferred to its ministers the burden of some of God's commandments to be borne for it by proxy. And a zeal for God—if that sacred name can thus be parodied—is shown chiefly by the infliction of arbitrary and most disproportionate punishment upon offenders not against the moral law of God but against the moral law of the world. Where God has spoken, man may sin and scarcely suffer: where the world has spoken, no sorrow and no suffering, no lapse of time, no sincerity of repentance, and no consistency of amendment, is allowed to replace the erring man or the erring woman within the pale of a human sympathy or even of a Christian charity. Such is zeal for God, when debased and disfigured by the modifying hand of man. Of such zeal it may truly be said, as it cannot be said of the other, that it is most commonly found, as it was found in Jehu, altogether divorced and dissevered from obedience.

And this brings us, in the second place, to apply to ourselves, in the way of counsel and warning, the unfavourable part of the character before us. Jehu had a zeal for God, but Jehu nevertheless took no heed to walk in God's law with all his heart.

There is great force in that word, *took no heed—observed not*, as the margin renders it—to walk in God's way. We all know what heedlessness is in a child. We know the trouble it gives in teaching, when we cannot

get what we call attention ; the stretching (as it were) of the muscles and sinews of the mind to the subject proposed, to the task in hand. And we know the vexation, the irritation, which is caused in supervision, by finding the same awkward trick, the same bad habit, the same troublesome fault, fallen into again and again, in spite of oft-repeated warnings and punishments, just because no heed was given ; because a sufficiently deep impression could not be made upon the light and shallow soil of that young mind to secure the permanence of a right recollection or the practical efficacy of a general wish to amend. Alas, my brethren, in the things of religion, in the ways of God and of the soul, we are all too much children. We are inattentive to God's teaching : we are heedless under God's discipline. It is astonishing, we say to ourselves in moments of remorse or penitence, how I could forget that precept again ; how I could fall again into that oft-laid snare ; how I could utter again that uncharitable or that unthankful or that irreverent expression ; how I could cherish again that sinful train of thought ; how I could, in spite of warnings and resolutions and prayers unnumbered, believe again the lying voice of the tempter, when he said to me that I might commit without fear that old sin yet once more, that I need not be too scrupulous, that there would be time enough afterwards for repentance. And surely, when we look back upon even a short lifetime, we must marvel at our slowness of heart to take in God's lessons of wisdom. How often have we been brought down by the stroke of His chastisement, whether in the form of sickness, or of sorrow, or of disappointment, or of

bereavement; how often have we seemed for the moment thoroughly humbled, completely subdued, finally softened, sobered, and changed; and yet no sooner has the hand ceased to smite, no sooner has the pressure been relieved, no sooner has light broken in upon us and the sun shone again, than the old carelessness, the old levity, the old presumption, the old audacity, has returned, and we are even as we were; only a little harder, a little more obstinate, a little less impressible!

Such is the heedlessness of human nature, and most of our sins may be traced up to it. Jehu took no heed—we take no heed—to the will of God. We think we know all about it: or we think that a little deviation will not be noticed, will not be punished, certainly will not be fatal: we admit into our lives little irregularities, into our hearts little dark places, and think that the general tenor may still be acceptable, that the general colour may be not dark but bright. And then we find by bitter experience that the beginning of sin, like the beginning of strife, is as the letting out of water, hard to restrain when it has once been suffered. And then we find by bitter experience that the conscience within is a delicate as well as powerful instrument; that its sensitiveness is soon destroyed, and along with it its use whether as a guide or a reprovcr. And thus we are taught—happy if it be not quite too late—that there is no safety for a Christian but in careful walking, in watchful living, in observing, in taking heed: *Wherewithal shall a man, young or old, guide and cleanse his way? even by giving heed thereto according to Thy word.* And thus, when we are tempted to think that perhaps this or that little

indulgence might do no great harm ; that perhaps for this one morning it may do no great harm to give up reading the Bible, or for this one evening to intermit our prayers ; that perhaps this little duty may be slightly performed for once, or for once left undone, and God not be displeased ; in all these things we learn at last that there is no safeguard for us but in punctual, minute, exact obedience ; that there is no end to concessions once begun, no limit to inaccuracies and inattentions once indulged ; and that, for us at all events, happiness as well as safety will depend upon absolute consistency, upon unintermitted watchfulness, if perhaps God may give us at last His grace of a perfect and an upright heart, established in His truth and devoted to His service.

Yes, my brethren, the text adds, *with all his heart. Jehu took no heed to walk in God's law with all his heart.* Is not this the fault in our service, the cause of our heedlessness, that the heart is not given to God ; not whole with Him, as it is written ; not right with God ? Therefore it was that Jehu gave zeal, but could not give obedience ; gave zeal, but could not give consistency ; gave zeal, but could not give love. And therefore it is that we too often give neither zeal nor obedience, neither zeal nor love.

My brethren, these histories of the Old Testament may not seem at first sight to have much of the Gospel in them : you may almost count them dry subjects for Christian souls. But is not the root of the Gospel in them ? for us, at all events, who can read them by the light of the New Testament ? Is not to-day's a Gospel

subject? It is our own fault assuredly if for us it is dry or lifeless. But I hope and believe that we have not found it so. It is not because a subject is reproving, or because it is arousing, that it is not a Gospel too. True tidings from God, whatever be their sound, are always good tidings also, if they be heard in time, and if they be listened to. It is self-deception, it is delusion, it is falsehood, which is our real enemy. Nothing is so unlike the true Gospel as that which says to us, Peace, Peace, when there is no peace. Anything which awakens us from sleep, anything which arouses us from death, is a Gospel; a note of the Gospel. So may this be! It says to us, Never think anything of zeal, in yourself or in another, except in so far as it is a fruit of love, an utterance of sincerity, the consistent expression of a devoted heart, of a watchful life. It says, Never take credit to yourself for declaiming against the sins of others. Jehu did more: he executed punishment, God's punishment, upon the sins of others: and yet he took no heed, himself, to walk in God's law. Be especially suspicious of yourself when you find words of condemnation, of contempt, or of abhorrence, most familiar to your tongue. Christian zeal, like Christian faith, worketh by love. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* If you are tender to the suffering, if you are plain with the sinful—yet both alike in humility and in all kindness—then you may hope that your zeal has something in it of Christ. But most of all look within. Look to the heart. See whether there is any love of God there. You can tell, if you will. You have no difficulty in saying whether

you like, whether you love, an earthly person : do you seek to be with them ? are you happy in their company ? do you miss them in absence ? do you long for their return ? Even thus is it with him who loves Christ, with him whose heart is in God's service. He loves prayer : he feels himself dull and desolate when he has been long kept from it : he flies back to it as his solace : he rests in it as a chief joy. And how is it with you in the matter of attention to God's will ? If you love an earthly person, how minutely do you carry out his wishes ! how little do you grudge toil and pains in doing so ! how do you reproach yourself if you should find that he misses something which he had asked for, or sees repeated that which he has complained of ! Even thus is it with him who loves Christ, with him whose heart is whole with God. He disregards no duty because it is small : he refuses no duty because it is difficult. He desires that God should be always with him : he sets the Lord always before him : there is no part of his life, public or private, which he tries to keep out of God's sight : there is no part of his heart, however secret, on which he does not desire that God's light should shine. O, my brethren, so long as ours is a grudging service, it will also be a thankless one : so long as we weigh and measure our acts for God, they will be burdensome, and they will be unproductive. Give all, and all will be happiness ; because all will be unity, all will be peace. In this one sense, if in no other, the whole is less than its parts : to give a part is burdensome— to give the whole is light. *Do this, and thou shalt*

live, was a condition of salvation too heavy for man : but thousands and tens of thousands have found rest and healing and joy in obeying the Gospel call, *My son, give me thy heart!*

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,
August 18, 1861.

SERMON XV.

*THE COMMANDMENT EXCEEDING
BROAD.*

PSALM CXIX. 96.

*I have seen an end of all perfection: but Thy commandment
is exceeding broad.*

Or (Prayer-Book Version),

*I see that all things come to an end: but Thy command-
ment is exceeding broad.*

WE have all felt the relief of escaping from a close and crowded room into the freshness and freedom of the open air. With some of us, that close and confined room may have been the chamber of sickness; and to escape from it is to be restored from the compulsory inactivity of illness to the liberty and vigour and power of health. With some men, though not, thank God, with us, that close and confined room may have been a prison; and to escape from it is to be released from the restraints of a penal seclusion into the freedom of will

and action which is the privilege of those who are unstained by crime.

One of the words which St Paul sometimes uses to express suffering is borrowed from this sort of experience. He speaks of anguish under the figure of *narrowness of space*, of straitness of room, of the pressure arising from confinement within too close limits. And we have abundant examples also in Scripture of the use of the opposite figure to express a condition of relief, of deliverance, and of happiness. Thus, when the patriarch Isaac, after a succession of struggles with the Philistines for the possession of wells of water, at last found one well for which they strove not; one which was obtained without dissension and might be enjoyed without fear of contradiction; he called the name of it *Rehoboth* (room, space, breadth): *for now*, he said, *the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.* The Psalmist more than once uses the same figure of freedom and amplitude of space, to denote a condition of mental and spiritual comfort. *Thou hast set my foot in a large room...I called upon the Lord in distress: the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place...I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

Something of the same contrast is observable in the words of the text. It describes the difference between everything that is of man and everything that is of God. The one has limits, has an end: the other is exceeding broad. Human perfection of all kinds has a visible term and bound: human excellence, human power, human knowledge, human life itself, comes to an end,

and is not: but God's commandment, that which God has ordained, that which God has taught, that which God has made known, or is willing to make known, of Himself, of His will, of His truth, of His character, of His glory, is exceeding broad: there is an amplitude in it, and a grandeur, and an abundance, and an expansiveness, which forbids any feeling of straitness or of stint or of cramping: a man may walk and run, as far as he will, in any direction, and he will never find himself at a fence or a boundary: the truth of God, the revelation of God, the character of God, is infinite like God Himself, and it is His will that we should expatiate in this domain without let or hindrance, without prohibition and without coercion.

The thought thus suggested is a very glorious one, and I propose it for your meditation this evening. *I see that all things else come to an end: but Thy commandment, Thy revelation, is exceeding broad.* The contrast is that between man's narrowness, in every sense of that word, and God's amplitude, God's grandeur, God's large and satisfying magnificence. We must reflect upon this contrast in some of its particulars.

1. *I see that all things come to an end: but, Thy word endureth for ever in heaven.* What an impression is forced upon us, by the progress of life, of the poverty of man and all that belongs to him, in point of duration! What a dream is earthly ambition, earthly consequence, earthly rank and wealth and honour! We ourselves have lived to see men pass through greatness into nothingness. We have flocked to look upon the form of some great general or statesman or potentate, who is now dust and

ashes. We have hung upon the lips of some eloquent orator, speaking of things concerning national interest or interests greater still; interests of the soul, secrets of eternity; and those lips are now for ever closed and silent. Others are now the powerful men, the admired men, the revered men: and we are curious, for a day, about them: it is their turn: soon it will be the turn of yet another: soon will the stage be occupied by a new set of actors, and gazed upon by a new set of spectators. *I see that all things come to an end.*

And it is not only as observers that we feel this. We feel it in ourselves. How fleeting are our own possessions, our own treasures, our own topics of absorbing interest! How did we, when we were children, boys, or young men, set our hearts upon this and that, which we must have, we thought, or be miserable. It came: it was given: and, behold, it was a shadow: or it came not: it was not given: and we survived the disappointment. Over and over again the desired thing has changed, for us, and been superseded: now we would give nothing for what was once, in our eyes, so precious: we marvel at the inexperience which could alone have made us thus distort and miscalculate, or at the stupidity which could alone have made us thus call evil good and good evil. And yet, perhaps, we are doing it again; doing it now. Perhaps we are even now calling something good which is really evil; desirable, which, if granted, would be ruinous. Certainly, to judge by the past, to judge even by an experience already our own, our present objects will hereafter appear to us insignificant. From the other world we shall look back upon them with contempt,

if not with abhorrence. *I see that all things come to an end*; not least human wishes, human aims, and human ambitions.

How comforting then, how satisfying, ought it to be to us, to know of just one thing which will not thus fail and terminate! *Thy commandment, Thy word*; that which God has spoken, whether in the way of disclosure, or of command, or of warning, or of promise. That endures; *endureth*, as the Psalmist says, *for ever in heaven*. The march of centuries affects not that. Human opinion, worldly change, the fluctuations of thought or fashion, the rise and fall of men and of nations, work no alteration there. That is still right which God has commanded: that is still wrong which God has forbidden: that is still true which God has revealed: that is still false which God has contradicted. The law of moral duty given in the wilderness of Sinai more than three thousand years ago, to a different nation from ours, amidst every circumstance of contrariety to our own, is still unchanged: it is read Sunday by Sunday in our churches as the unaltered and unalterable rule of conduct: it changes not as we change, because it is God's utterance to man's reason and to man's conscience. It is so with every part of His Word. There is not a place where Christ is named, not a congregation in which His creed is professed, in which conscience is not stirred, repentance quickened, and faith made fruitful, by the repetition of those well-known words, handed down not more in Scripture than by the living voice of parents and teachers, which reason with us of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come, till the sinner trembles inwardly and resolves at

least, if it be at some distant day, to call for the Apostle and for the Saviour. These things are the same in all generations. These things partake of that permanence which is an attribute of God only. It is a strange thing, we might say, knew we not the cause, that the same Book should be appropriate to the case of every individual of every age; should never need to be re-written or re-worded; should be intelligible in its practical parts to every mind, and impressive, in its leading disclosures, alike to every kind of human character. I see that all things come to an end: human works, human writings, are for one nation only, for one age, far more often for one year, not for another: they refer, for the most part, to matters of passing concern, of limited or even local interest: if in a few, a very few cases, they survive into another age, and are prized by students of various race and character, still even these are bounded in their range by certain conditions of intelligence, of taste, of character: but the Word of God, spoken once with the voice, and now preserved by writing from adulteration and from decay, endures for all time, and is vocal to all sorts and conditions of men: in every land and age, he that is of God heareth God's Word, and finds in it, whosoever he be, a light to his mind and a lamp to his steps. *Thy commandment is exceeding broad.*

2. *I have seen an end of all perfection.* That which has been said of human life may be said also of human character. We have spoken of man's limits in point of duration: he and all his—enjoyments, projects, interests, attainments, glorious—are essentially short-lived and transitory: but the other version of the text seems to

extend the remark to a further point; that human excellence, human goodness, has a bound, and a narrow one: if you sound it, you reach the bottom: if you measure it, you can take its compass: there is an end of all human perfection, as there is an end of all human duration.

The text speaks not of bad men only, but even of the good. It supposes that a man has excellence, has something which may even be called perfection: it only says that there is an end of it, a limit to it. Sadly, painfully true is this, oftentimes, in its worst sense. Again and again has human goodness in the long run broken down. A man who not only seemed to be in the right way, but who, as an Apostle expresses it, was running well, has been hindered by some adverse influence that he should not to the end obey the truth. One who not only thought himself to be standing, but was standing, has failed to take heed: he has grown secure: he has been high-minded instead of fearing: he has counted himself to have apprehended, and then, from some untoward accident, his out-stretched hand has been diverted from grasping the prize. He has suffered some little root of bitterness to spring up inwardly and defile him: he has allowed himself in some doubtful indulgence, and awakened only to find himself its slave: he has forgotten the exhortation which reminds us that no man can serve two masters, and has hoped to succeed in combining the two incompatible services of Christ and the world, of time and eternity, of the pleasures of sin and the recompence of the reward. Thus at last the eye of men, even as the eye of God all along, has seen an end of his perfection. He has fallen, fallen away, fallen in mid

course, fallen finally: and men of God who looked upon his tomb could only exclaim over it in sorrow and godly fear, *Alas, my brother! I have seen an end of all perfection.*

But the words are true in a sense short of this worst and saddest: they are true even of men who fall not away, but of whom we may well hope that they are *true and faithful partakers of the benefit.* How often do we observe a limited even where is no fallacious perfection! How much are we disappointed oftentimes in good men; in men whom we thought and still think good! How do they break down, oftentimes, under the test of trial! What weaknesses come out when we, or, more frequently, when circumstances, probe them! How does temper fail under provocation, or humility under neglect, or unworldliness under temptation, or thankfulness under disappointment! How do we find, when we go to them for counsel, that they have no resource; or for encouragement, that they have little faith and less hope! How do they grieve us by their harshness towards the erring in life, or by their unfairness towards the erring in doctrine! How do we miss at every turn the mind which was in Christ Jesus; the entire wisdom, the absolute truthfulness, the perfect charity! We go away with the confession wrung from our hearts, *I have seen an end of all perfection:* there was sincerity, but there was no wisdom; there was a general good intention, but there was no minute, no exact performance! And then have we not turned with relief to that character, that mind, that word *exceeding broad*, in which there has been no risk of reaching the end, of sounding the depth, or ex-

hausting the fulness? that character, even the mind of God revealed in Christ Jesus, in which there is perfect purity together with perfect patience, perfect truth with perfect charity, perfect wisdom with perfect love? that mind in which is no variableness neither shadow of turning; no fickleness, and no impulsiveness; no one-sidedness, and no narrowness; no exaggeration, no weakness, and no one part dark? Surely, if in one sense with awe, in another and a higher sense with comfort, we look off from man's littleness to God's greatness, and learn to say, not with humility only but with thankfulness, *I have seen an end of all perfection: but Thy commandment is exceeding broad.*

3. The breadth of God's Word, in contrast with the narrowness of human doctrine, is a topic full of interest. How does the Bible comprehend, and gather into one, all the good parts of all the human systems of theology that were ever framed! Every form of error within the Christian community in any age of the Church has arisen, not from the invention of a falsehood, but from the distortion of a truth. Some clause or some chapter of the New Testament has been fastened upon: it has been fetched away from the rest of the New Testament; perhaps forced from its context: it has been stereotyped, it has been microscopically examined, it has been logically dissected, reasoned upon, argued from: and then a whole sect has taken it for its watchword, and made it, for itself and for others, the one test of truth. Meanwhile there lay in another part of the same holy Book, perhaps very near the former, a statement of another and a different kind: if the one passage spoke of Christ's humanity, the other

as strongly asserted His divinity: if the one dwelt upon the sovereignty of God's grace, the other enforced no less earnestly the responsibility of the free-will in man: and, while one party takes the former as its sole criterion of sound doctrine, another party no less vehemently insists upon the supreme dignity and importance of the latter. The Church of Christ rings for half a century with the tumult, and a permanent breach and schism may be the consequence. The asserters of free-will, and the asserters of sovereign grace, can no longer speak of each other with charity, or worship the one God in union. And yet in their first rise both were in the right: Scripture sided not with one but with both: each had a fragment of the truth of God, and the error of both lay only in asserting that that fragment was the whole. They should have allowed, each of them, that there was that in the Bible which seemed to favour their opponent: they should have remembered this, and they should have moderated their tone in the recollection: they should have understood that, with reference to the revelation as well as to the Providence of God, there is ever room for the application of the saying, *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.* The time for reconciling the various disclosures is not yet come: at present we must be contented to hold them all in combination. We must make room within our system for opposite aspects, for unreconciled sides, of God's whole truth. Unless we do so, we must be wrong, however right we are. We may be right, we must be right, in asserting the truth of whatever is really found in God's Word: but we may be wrong, and we must be wrong, in denying,

forgetting, or disparaging, the truth of any other thing, however apparently diverse, which is also really found in God's Word. We ought to be able, even now, to rejoice in the thought that God's revelation is *exceeding broad*; very large, very simple, very comprehensive; large enough to give a standing-place for all who are truly sincere, truly in earnest, in studying and in learning from the words which Christ and which God has spoken. It is they who can only take in one mutilated portion of His truth, and who exclude and denounce every other portion of it, who are really the presumptuous, really the erring, really the heretical.

It is a delightful thought, that one day we shall know as we are known; that one day, if we only walk now in faith and in charity, we shall be enabled, in the full light of God's presence, to perceive the consistency of things now disjointed, the harmony of sounds now discordant. Meanwhile, as we love our souls, we must be willing to wait, and we must be candid in receiving. *Thy commandment is exceeding broad*: our doctrine, if it is true, must be able to stand this test. Is it the whole, or is it only one part, of the whole counsel of God as revealed to us in Scripture? Does it embrace within its compass all that God has said; so far, at least, as to exclude and to deny, to force and to mutilate, nothing? Few indeed are those ministries, or those schemes of doctrine, of which this can be said: God grant us the wisdom to aim at it and to attain to it, in some measure, in our own! The importance of doctrine is great: by it souls must be nourished, or left hungry; by it lives must be regulated, or left wandering. O, my brethren, learn to love your

Bible for its breadth of teaching. Admire its comprehensiveness. See how it urges the responsibility of man, and yet gives God all the glory. See how it sets forth the sinfulness of sin, and yet magnifies the mercy of God towards the sinful. See how it takes within its ample fold every sort and condition of man as he is, and offers to feed each with the very food convenient for him; the food of wisdom and of tenderness and of strength and of hope and of love; that food from which the most cultivated mind may derive profit, and the saddest and most sorrowful and most sin-burdened heart comfort and relief. All things else come to an end; meagre in their supplies, narrow in their views, limited in their compass, barren in their consolations: but the revelation of God as made by Himself is exceeding broad, and the largest of minds and hearts can find room for themselves within it. O what a blessing is it, to feel ourselves in contact with the infinite; the eternal in duration, the unbounded in extent, the unsearchable in depth, the inexhaustible in satisfaction! to know that we are but on the margin of that sea of God's counsels which no human foot has yet tracked, and which no length or profoundness of search will ever render less wonderful or less glorious! *Thy righteousness standeth like the strong mountains: Thy judgments are a great deep...O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!...For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things: to whom be glory for ever!*

It remains only that I briefly press upon you the question, Is the Word of God your study, your medita-

tion, your delight? O learn more, from what has been said to-night, of its dignity and of its grandeur! O believe that it is worth your study, and will repay it! It is *exceeding broad*: there is room, on its ample platform, for every capacity, for every gift, for every desire and every want, of man: let it not fail to find room for you! It has a blessing for each one of us: but we must come, and come betimes, to receive it. If we come not while the day of grace lasts—and its length, for any of us, who can tell? there can be for us but a closed door and an outer darkness. *Ye know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,
August 25, 1861.

SERMON XVI.¹

*THE GOSPEL AN INCENTIVE TO
INDUSTRY IN BUSINESS.*

PSALM I. 4.

His leaf also shall not wither; and look, whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper.

MORE than fifty years ago, in the fourth year of the century, a small bequest was left by a native of this Town (to whose munificence the poor of the place are largely indebted) to secure an annual sermon in our Parish Church, on the first Sunday in September, on the following subject: *The genuine tendency of the Christian Religion to lead its professors to industry and diligence in business.* A very noble topic, my brethren, if it might be rightly handled! And a topic, also, common as it may sound, not always presenting itself to our thoughts, or urged in our Churches, with the force or the attractiveness which ought to belong to it. God grant His blessing to the consideration of it to-day!

¹ This Sermon was preached, in accordance with the requirement of Quintin Kay, before the young men apprenticed under his charity.

There is a large choice of texts in Holy Scripture bearing upon this point directly and indirectly. Some of them will occur readily to any student of the Bible. But, upon the whole, my choice has been directed to that beautiful and well-known Psalm which stands at the head of our sacred collection of inspired Hymns, and which has been used in our service on this day, which happens to be not only the first Sunday but also the first day of the month.

Without further preface, I will make a few plain remarks upon the sound and salutary doctrine of the Psalm itself. This will lay a good foundation for the more special work entrusted to me to-day.

Now we will say, first of all, with reference to the general aspect of the Psalm, how important it is that all worship, and all religion, should recognize the essential difference, not only between good and bad acts, but between good and bad men. We are very apt, not only to break down the barrier, for ourselves, between that which is right and that which is wrong; calling things by false names until we really lose all strong sense of their moral complexion; but also to remove and obliterate utterly, with regard to others, the landmark between the righteous and the wicked, the godly and the ungodly, the holy man and the sinner. It is spoken of by the prophet Malachi as one of the results of a coming day of judgment, that this displaced landmark will then at last be restored to its position. *Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not.* It is a question often asked

by children of their parents, *Is he a good man?* expressing a sort of intuition as to this matter; an instinctive feeling that the difference between the good and the bad is not so shadowy and evanescent as we are sometimes tempted to make it, but that, however little man can fathom or ought to seek to fathom the mystery, *the Lord*, at all events, *knoweth them that are His*. My brethren, while we check and correct this tendency; while we refuse to characterize decisively, for good or evil, the various characters and the various persons crossing our path in life; yet let us remember, for our own warning at least, that there is a difference between one and another in the sight of God; a difference as wide as between acceptance and rejection, between acquittal and condemnation, between heaven and hell. That is the great elementary truth to which the first Psalm bears testimony. And I say that it is well that it should stand there at the very head of the Psalms, as a sort of direction and finger-post to the path of life and to the path of death.

Again, I would ask the attention of my hearers to-day—and more especially the attention of those young persons who are amongst us—to the description here given of the life and character of each of these two classes.

1. The good man is described first by negatives. What is he not? *Blessed is the man*, as the Bible Version gives the words, *that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful*. There are three kinds of persons whom he avoids. Walking, or standing, or sitting, he refuses to do so by the advice or in the company of

certain persons, described successively as *the ungodly, sinners, the scornful*.

i. He will not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. If a man has no regard for God, if he shows by his words or by his actions that God is not in all his thoughts, then he cannot be a good adviser. The man who would be really happy must decline his counsel. My young friends, mark well your companions. Not in uncharitableness, still less in self-righteousness, but, to speak plainly, in self-defence, in the exercise of a sensible as well as religious concern for your own safety, you must (and you easily can) observe the character and the principles of those amongst whom either education or business throws you. And, if you are compelled to say to yourself, That young man, or that older man, whatever else he may be, does not fear and does not love God; then you must not walk in his counsel; that is, you must not take his advice, or follow his direction, as to what you shall do or not do. If you do so, you will some day bitterly repent it. That is the first point.

ii. Again, the man who would be happy must not stand in the way of sinners. As some men are *ungodly*, so some men are *sinners*. As some men have not God before them, so some men live sinfully. You may not always be aware of it. You may be deceived about it for a time. But in the long run a man of this sort will betray himself to those around him. At all events he must betray himself if he would draw you, his companion, into actual sin. Now, whenever or in whatever way you find him out as a sinner, this Psalm says you

must not stand in his way. You must not stand about, you must not wait or loiter, in the road or the street by which he passes to his sin. That is the figure. Do not let him find you hanging idly about when he passes by. If he does, you will be in danger of being induced to go with him. O, my brethren, in this Town we might take the advice thus given almost literally. Is it not oftentimes in your roads and in your lanes, at the mouth of your yards and at what the Psalmist calls *the thievish corners of your streets*, that temptation first assails you? Take heed how, in that most literal of all senses, you be found standing idle in the way of sinners!

iii. But, once again, besides the dangers of walking and of standing, there is a danger also in sitting. The man who would be happy must not sit in the seat of the scornful. The Psalmist, under God's holy inspiration, knew us well. He wrote for all times, not only for his own, when he spoke of the seat of the scornful. Who is meant by the scornful? What is the character thus designated? It is the same which is elsewhere described as that of the *scoffer*. He is the man who mocks at everything, even at sin. *Fools make a mock at sin*. He is the man who turns everything into a jest; even holy things. He is the man—alas, his name now is legion—who carries the habit of joking into all matters; sees nothing serious in human life, nothing sacred in divine truth, and nothing formidable even in a future judgment. You know that there are such persons: some of you may have suffered from them: is it possible that any one of you may be of them? may be what the Psalmist calls a scorner? *Blessed is the man*, he says, *who sitteth not in*

the seat of the scornful. The ungodly may walk ; the sinner may stand ; but the scornful sit : they occupy a position of dignity : they are the world's censors ; in our days they are the world's judges : their cutting words, their sharp sayings, their insolent and arbitrary sentences, decide the fate of books, the conduct of rulers, the characters of men : in humbler life, they give the law to social circles, and exercise a fearful tyranny over the acts and habits of youthful associates. O sit not thou, the Psalmist says, in the seat of the scornful ! Aim not, if you love your soul, at the reputation of a censor, a jester, or a wit ! More than this : avoid the seat where such men are enthroned : they will overbear your better judgment ; they will insensibly lead you to think and to judge even as they.

2. These three are the good man's enemies ; his, because God's. These things are what he is not ; what he avoids and dreads. Now, what is he ? Can we look within, and see where the secret lies, of his character, and of his life ? Yes, the Psalmist goes on to say, *But his delight is in the law of the Lord : and in His law doth he meditate*, or, as the Prayer-Book Version gives it, *exercise himself, day and night.* The Word of God is his counsellor. That advice, which he will not receive from the ungodly, he takes, and he seeks, from God Himself. His delight is in God's law, in God's Word. It is not, to him, a closed book. It is not a mere Sunday duty to read a Chapter in it. No, it is his delight. *Thy testimonies*, he can say, *are my delight and my counsellors. Day and night*, in hours of business, of recreation, and of repose, he meditates in God's law : when he cannot be

reading it, it is still dear to him, still treasured in his memory, still cherished in his heart. It guides his life, it directs his judgment, it breathes in his spirit, even when it is not in his hand, and not upon his lips.

3. And then, after viewing the good man in these two aspects—what he is not, and what he is—what he eschews, and what he loves—we are briefly told, in the third and last place, what his course is, and what his end. *He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.* God's blessing is upon that man. There is no mistake as to his being under a divine benediction. Every thing is, with him, orderly and seasonable. There is a regular process of culture and of fruit-bearing: nothing miraculous, nothing marvellous perhaps, in his condition or in his progress: we are not surprised by a sudden gathering in mid-winter, or by a harvest that precedes the sowing: we only see that, in him, as in a duly cultivated and well-watered garden, all things come in their season: the work of grace within goes on we know not how, but there is a growth, we see, a progress, and a maturity: even sorrow and affliction, like that *digging and dunging* of which a well-known Parable speaks, have their place in his training, and yield afterwards the peaceable fruits of righteousness in him who has been exercised thereby.

His leaf also shall not wither: and look, whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper.

My brethren, it is the special object of this Sermon

to exhibit *the Christian Religion*, that is, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, in one of its many beneficent operations; in its *tendency*, its *genuine* (that is, real and not merely nominal) tendency, as the terms of the bequest express it, *to lead its professors*, those who, like all of us, profess and call themselves Christians, and who, in so doing, are no hypocrites, *to industry and diligence in business*. I have sought thus far to show you what manner of men the true professors of Christianity are. I have drawn my text from the Scriptures of the Old Testament. But the character of the godly man, in the points touched upon, has been the same under both of God's great Dispensations: it scarcely matters, in these respects, in which of the two mirrors we reflect his image. The general character is the same: but the Gospel added not a little to the inducements of godliness.

Take the particular point now before us. See what that Gospel of Jesus Christ did for the promotion of human industry and diligence in business, in the three particulars, of precept, of motive, and of example. A very few words must suffice upon each of these topics.

i. Open the New Testament where you may, you will find something bearing upon the duties of common life. There is no encouragement given in it to desert those ordinary duties, on the plea of greater devotion to religious contemplation and worship, or on any other. These excuses, where they have been made, have been made in despite of the Gospel, not out of it. I might fill many pages with precepts of a

directly opposite kind. Our Lord's discourses, wherever they touch upon duty (and where do they not?) represent human life as a time of work, and God's call as a call to work. The very imagery of the Parables is drawn, not from the amusements of a fashionable trifling, but from the occupations of a busy industry. What is the Parable of the Sower, of the tares, of the mustard-seed, of the leaven, of the hidden treasure, of the pearl of great price, of the net cast into the sea—to run through the contents of one whole Chapter of Parables—but a picture, again and again presented, of human activity in the discharge of a life-long labour? What is the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, but an indication of the sort of calling wherewith Christians are called; a calling to work and to endurance, to perseverance and to patience, to a day of labour and an evening of recompence? What, above all, is the Parable of the Talents, but a solemn warning as to the demand of God upon human energy amidst opportunities few or many; an earnest correction of the great mistake, that it is only they who can do much who are required to do anything; a gracious assurance that everything which we possess is a memento of God's care and regard for our service, and that every man shall receive in the end, be he great or small, honoured or despised, upon earth, according to his own honest, hearty, self-denying labour? And, if we pass from the Gospels to the Epistles, we find the latter full of exhortations such as these few which follow. *Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serv-*

ing the Lord....Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not...Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart...Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing..Even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that, if any would not work, neither should he eat: for we hear that there are some who walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies: now them that are such, we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. There is room in the Gospel for every kind of work: there is room for the sick, there is room for the aged, there is room for the suffering: but there is no room for the idle. They must repent of their wasted time, and set to work earnestly; or Christ's Gospel will be for them a dead letter, an empty sound.

ii. The Gospel has not only added precepts to those which went before it as to the duty of labour: it has also furnished industry with new motives. *What reward, it bids us ask, shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits that He hath done unto me?* What can I do to express my thankfulness to God, not only for creation and preservation and all the blessings of this life, but above all for His inestimable love towards me in my redemption through Christ Jesus, in giving me so many means of grace and so sure a hope of glory? And the answer lies beside the question. *He hath showed*

thee, O man, what is good; what is right and acceptable before Him: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might, as to the Lord, and not unto men; and He will accept, He will bless, thy stedfast and thy loving labour. Christ redeemed thee from the curse of guilt, from the power of sin, that thou, by quietness, by sobriety, by useful and Christian industry, mightest show forth the praises of Him who called thee out of darkness into His marvellous light. Redemption itself is work's new motive. The love of Christ constraineth me to labour, lest any reproach, of idleness, of uselessness, or of disorder, should fall upon Him who loved me and gave Himself for me.

iii. Finally, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has enforced industry by a new example. Yes, my brethren, we will pass upwards from Christians to Christ; through Apostles and Prophets, through saints and martyrs, who all lived and died in toil for their Master's sake, unto Him who is the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, in whose strength they all served their generation, in whose tender mercy they all, one by one, at last fell asleep. We will pass upwards through them to Him, and learn the duty of *diligence in business* from Him who is the one Example, as He is the one Saviour, of us all.

My brethren, there are many ideas utterly incompatible and incongruous with the thought of our Lord Jesus Christ. Everything that is an imperfection, a

moral infirmity, a questionable tendency, in man, is repugnant and abhorrent to our conception of Him. But I will venture to say that no one defect is more absolutely inconceivable in His perfect character, than that of idleness. Our Lord Jesus Christ was, above all men, diligent in business. He had a calling upon earth, and He followed it. In early years, yes, until the age of thirty years, He worked as a carpenter in a shop at Nazareth. His own hands contributed to the support of an earthly home and a human family. O the depth of that condescension! *Being in the form of God...He made Himself empty of that glory, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men;* yes, made in all points like as we are, save only sin! Who can complain, after this, of the humility of his position, or of the irksomeness of his work, on earth? The Saviour, who was also the Creator, occupied a mean village dwelling, and wrought in a workshop with His own hands, during thirty precious years of that precious life. And when at last the fulness of the time was come, and He emerged from that profound obscurity to exercise the glorious office of the Prophet and the Revealer of God amongst men, was there any difference then in this particular? Was life then for Him a period of greater ease or refinement or repose? Nay, my brethren, it was a life without rest: when He rested at all, it was not so much for sleep as for prayer. Read the record of a single day of that holy life, as it is preserved for us in the first chapter of the Evangelist St Mark. It was a sabbath-

day; a day, to others, of relaxation and of intermitted toil. What was it to Him? First there is the work, no light one, of teaching in the congregation. That teaching is broken in upon by a scene of excitement and terror; the outcry of a poor demoniac, who says, under the possession of an unclean spirit, *Let us alone: what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth?* and who, by the power of that almighty word, is instantly relieved, emancipated, comforted; restored to the government of reason and conscience, and to the peaceful occupations of a safe and useful life. As soon as He quits the synagogue, and enters into a house, new toils and new duties await Him. There is a fever to be healed, and another life thus given back by the intervention of its Lord and Maker. Then, *at even, when the sun did set*, and when others were thinking of that repose which belongs to the season, He, on the contrary, had to see *all the city gathered together at His door*, bringing to Him *all manner of sickness and all manner of disease*, to be separately enquired into, separately ministered to, separately healed and blessed. Long hours thus passed before rest could come. At last, we may suppose, He lay down to sleep. But the night which labour contracted at the one end, devotion shortened at the other. *In the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.* Even thither He is pursued by the importunity of man. *Simon and they that were with him followed after Him: and when they had found Him, they said unto Him, All men seek*

for Thee. And He said to them, Let us go into the next towns and preach there also: for therefore came I forth. O, my brethren, look on that picture of industry and diligence in business, and go forth from the contemplation, if you can, to be indolent, self-pleasing, idle, useless men!

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,
September 1, 1861.

SERMON XVII.

THE KING UPON THE HILL OF ZION.

PSALM II. 6.

Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.

WE considered this morning a Psalm of a very general character. It spoke of the righteous and of the wicked: of the happiness of the one—of his conduct in doing and in avoiding—of what he loves and what he abhors—of the secret of his strength and of his peace—of his orderly progress from the planting to the fruit-bearing—of the permanence of his produce, and the success of his endeavours. *His leaf also shall not wither: and look, whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper.*

To-night I would direct your thoughts to another of the Psalms for the day; a Psalm of a very different nature. As the first Psalm is of a general kind; one which deals only with religion as a life of piety towards God and of well-doing towards men; so the second Psalm has much in it of the spirit of prophecy, and can only be intelligently read in the light of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am not speaking to-night to unbelievers or what are commonly called freethinkers—though indeed no

term was ever more incorrectly applied than is that of freethinkers to men who, even more than others, think within bounds, and very narrow bounds, upon every subject which has to do with Christ and the Gospel; to-night, I say, I am not speaking to such persons—and therefore I shall not stay to vindicate the Christian character of this Psalm, which seems to me to breathe in every line of it, and to be only got rid of by a sophistry far more irrational than any credulity. Taking the Psalm in that sense in which fair criticism, almost as much as Scripture authority, teaches us to understand it, we will ask God's blessing upon the study and application of it with reference to ourselves and our own state and wants.

The twelve verses of the Psalm seem to fall naturally into four divisions, each consisting of three verses.

1. The first of these sets before us in a bold and striking picture the opposition of men to the kingdom of Christ and of God. There is a raging multitude gathered together, whole nations of the earth, with their rulers and kings, for the avowed purpose of shaking off the yoke of God and of His Anointed. I need not mention that *the Anointed One* is the translation, in English, of the terms *Messiah*, or *Christ*. When this passage from the second Psalm is quoted in the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, it is in this form: *The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against His Christ*. God's Christ is God's Anointed One; that Person whom God, as it is said in the tenth chapter of the Acts, *anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power* for the glorious threefold

office of His Prophet, of His Priest, and of His King. Now the representation here made is, that there is a general rising of the world against the yoke, that is, against the restraining will and word, of Christ, and of Him from whom Christ came. There is a general cry rising from the earth, *Let us break their bands*, the bands of God and of His Christ, *asunder, and cast away their cords from us*. This has been true in all times, less or more. *The carnal mind*, St Paul says, *is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*. It is only they who are, as he expresses it in the same passage, *not in the flesh but in the spirit*, by having the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in them, who are delivered from this enmity, and enabled to yield a willing service, of heart and life, to the God who made them, and to the Saviour who redeemed them with His most precious blood.

This has been always true: and we have some reason to think that it will be more signally manifested as the end draws on. It is not easy for one generation to compare itself accurately with any that have gone before. We are prone to exaggerations, both for good and evil, when we ourselves are concerned. But still I think, we can discern some indications, in our own time, of a growing insubordination to the authority of Christ. There is less, within that nominal Church which for us is almost coextensive with the world, of a sluggish and torpid acquiescence in truths unrealized and disregarded: there is more of positive life—and we would thank God for it: but is there not also, on the other hand, more of a definite and outspoken infidelity? Are not things said

now, and written, against the Gospel and against the divine nature of Christ, which certainly some years ago would not have been written and spoken by persons similarly circumstanced and of similar character? Is there not something of a ranging and marshalling of the hosts, as if for decisive combat, which the eye of faith may recognize as a token of the approach of that day of which the Prophet Joel has written, *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision?* If this be so, is it not a matter of vital importance for each one of us, that we should take our side, and take it rightly, against that day? We know not how soon the final struggle between truth and error, between faith and unbelief, may be coming upon us: we know not how powerful, or how insidious, may be, for each one of us, the persuasions of that lying vanity which seeks to seduce men from their Saviour. O, is it possible that there may be, even amongst us, even amongst the worshippers and professed servants of Christ present here this evening, any who are saying in their hearts, *Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us?* Yes, if there be one who is living in sin; if there be one who is cherishing any secret, any bosom sin; if there be one who is using his influence over others for a bad purpose; if there be one who is a lover of sceptical or immoral books; if there be one who laughs at good men, or who is living himself without prayer and without communion; that person—and dare we hope that he is not amongst us? is saying of Christ in his heart, if not with his lips, *Let me break His bands asunder, let me cast away His cords, His cords of love, from me.*

2. We turn to the second section of the Psalm before us. It extends from the fourth to the sixth verse. It tells us how God regards this insurrection of earth against His Christ. *He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.* If God is to speak to men, He must speak in man's language. It is not really that the sin of man, his devotion to his own ruin, his obstinate rejection of mercy, or his foolish warfare against the truth, is a matter viewed lightly, or treated with ridicule, in heaven, in that place where all is truth and all is reverence and all is love; but this is the figure which best expresses the utter futility, the utter folly and helplessness, of a struggle between man and God, between the thing formed and Him that formed it. O, my brethren, it is no exaggeration of the simple truth. What must our arguments and our discussions, our limitations and our concessions, appear in that place where all is seen as it is, and where the inhabitants of the world are counted as grasshoppers? How trivial yet how serious, how harmless yet how suicidal, must there appear those attacks upon God and His Revelation, which in this lower world pass for wit or for wisdom, for ingenious novelty or for deep discernment! *Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure. Yet have I set my King—thus He speaks—upon my holy hill of Zion.* The silence of God is at last broken. *God is a righteous Judge, strong and patient; and God is provoked every day. If a man will not turn, He will whet His sword.* The contrast is that of St Paul's address to the Athenians: *The times of this ignorance God winked at: but now commandeth all*

men everywhere to repent; because He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained. The kings of the earth may set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Christ...YET have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. What a solemn, what a formidable testimony against all who resist or impugn the truth! None the less for them—none the less because they gainsay or ridicule—none the less because they in words oppose or in works deny Him—God has made this same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ...The Lord shall send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion: rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies...Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.

3. And now with the third section of the Psalm there is a change of Speaker. *I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee.* We are taught in the New Testament to see the fulfilment of this *decree* not in the eternal sonship, and not in the incarnation, of our Lord Jesus Christ, but in His resurrection from the dead. In St Paul's discourse at Antioch in Pisidia, we read, *And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee.* The resurrection of Jesus was the fulfilment of the words, *Thou art my Son, &c.* Even as we read again in St Paul's Epistle to the Romans, *Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our*

Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to, or, by the operation of, the Spirit of holiness, the Holy Spirit, by the resurrection from the dead. It was the resurrection of Jesus which declared Him to be the Son of God according to the *decree* here spoken of in prophecy. And thus also in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read, once again, *So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an High Priest, but He that said unto Him, Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten Thee.* The investiture of Christ with the office of our great High Priest was the fulfilment of the prophetic announcement, *Thou art my Son, &c.* And upon that office of the High Priest of man He entered by resurrection. On earth He was the Prophet: not till He had died had He any atoning blood with which to present Himself, when now He lived again to do so, before the presence of God in the most holy place of the eternal temple.

And, as the priesthood of Christ, so also His kingly throne, was founded upon His resurrection. *Ask of me, so the Divine decree continues, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron: Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.* How exactly is this account of His entrance upon His kingdom the language of His own prayer to the Father in the immediate prospect of the completion of His earthly work by crucifixion: *I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Thou me, with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the*

world was. That glory was to be entered upon through resurrection. And in accordance with this prayer in the fore-view of His sufferings was the language of our Lord to His disciples when those sufferings were surmounted, and when, in the fulness of risen life, He says to them, *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.* The priesthood and the kingdom, like the sonship out of which both spring, are the results of the resurrection.

My brethren, I cannot pass on without saying, in one brief word, how little like the Gospel, as our Lord and His Apostles delivered it, must be any system which teaches men to disregard or to disparage the crowning miracle of the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is the very keystone of the Gospel arch: they who remove it must get themselves a new Gospel: they can never patch up the old Gospel without it. God give us all grace to hold it fast, and to live by it! *If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain...If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain: ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.*

4. One last section, also of three verses, yet remains. It is a word of application; the suitable close of the truths just declared. *Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.* If no efforts of yours can shake the throne of Christ; if God has certainly invested Him with universal dominion; if the uttermost parts of the earth are by sure anticipation given Him for His possession, and if, consequently, all who will not have Him to reign over them must in the end be discom-

fited and brought to nought; what is it which prudence dictates to you? Surely, to be humble in time. Surely, to learn, while you may, a lesson of reverence and godly fear. *Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.* What a word of divine wisdom is that, for each one of us! *Rejoice with trembling.* Rejoice: for the Gospel tells of a free salvation; forgiveness for the guilty, cleansing for the sinful, hope for the desperate, life for the dead. But forget not the added caution; *with trembling.* How shall we escape if we neglect, if we abuse, if we trifle with, so great salvation? The greatness of the salvation is the measure of their danger who hear of it without listening, or listen to it without obeying. *Kiss the Son*, in token of submission and of homage, *lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little.* The words are very remarkable; yes, my brethren, very salutary. It is as if it were said, Do not think to say in your hearts, I may go a little way in sinning; Christ is merciful, and, if my sin is not very great, He will deal gently with it: beware, rather, lest His wrath be kindled against you ever so little; for, if it be kindled but a little, it is formidable, it is terrible, it is a consuming fire. O beware lest you, beginning from small departures, have in the last day to combine those two most opposite ideas, and call upon the rocks and mountains to hide you from *the wrath of the Lamb!* *Kiss the Son* betimes, *lest He be angry.* *Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.* There is no other safety: there is no other hope.

My brethren, the caution is not needless. God give us grace to ponder it! There is not enough of Christ in

our thoughts even of religion. There is not enough of Christ—I often deeply feel it—in our sermons. Hence a vague, dreamy, purposeless religion. Hence a cold, dry, unpersuasive Gospel. Hence a want of purely Christian faith; and, let me add, strongly conscious of it, a want of Christian reverence and of godly fear. We greatly need the thought of Christ in His atonement. Without it, we grovel on in our sins, and never get them dismissed. That is the very meaning of the *remission* of sins: it is, their dismissal: it is, the having them put away, sent away, discarded, banished, done with, by a sentence of entire absolution. That, I say, is one want. But we much need the thought of Christ also in His greatness; in His present exaltation, in His kingly glory, in His universal and irresistible dominion. We greatly need that awe of Him of which we read as resting on the minds of His disciples when they saw Him after He was risen: *None of the disciples durst ask Him, Who art Thou? knowing that it was the Lord.* It is very sad that we do not love Christ more; that we do not more sincerely trust in Him; that we do not more eagerly seek and more tenderly cherish the thought of His propitiation, of His sacrifice, of His intercession, of His priesthood. But I am not sure whether, when we think of it, it is not even more dreadful that we have so little fear of Him. Really, if the Gospel be true, if this Psalm be true, we have great cause to fear Him. That sort of indifference, that sort of disregard, that sort of boldness—I can call it by no other name, that sort of audacity—which is so common amongst us, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ; an audacity shown in disobeying Him, an audacity

shown in discussing Him, an audacity shown in going on as if He were not, as if every word which He says of Himself were at least an open question, if not a false claim; and this, not during a few weeks or months of anxious questioning, but all through life; in combination with a Christian name, with a Christian profession, with a Christian worship, and even with a Christian communion; all this is indeed a very grave matter, when we come to think of it: and dare I say that none of us are chargeable with it? Can I hope that none of us who are here assembled are guilty of the sin, of the impiety, of daring the anger of Christ (as this Psalm expresses it) at least a little? of walking carelessly, of walking confidently, of walking presumptuously, before Him, if we have not gone altogether astray, and counted the blood of the covenant an absolutely unholy thing?

For these and such like diseases of the soul I know of no remedy so potent as the kind of revelations contained in this Psalm. What we need is, to have the position of Jesus Christ reasserted and reestablished amongst us His professed people. We want to have Him set forth before us in all His tenderness, as though crucified amongst us. We want to have Him set forth before us in all His greatness, as though enthroned, as though crowned, as though reigning, amongst us. So He is. *He ascended into heaven*, we say Sunday by Sunday, *and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.* Is that true? Are those three particulars true—His ascension, His session, His return? If they be, then *out of thine own mouth will I judge thee*, thou wicked, thou

slothful, thou unfaithful servant! *Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.* You may band yourselves together to disregard or to dethrone Him: you may leave Him out of sight in your plans, you may modify or annul His laws, you may say, *Where is the promise of His coming?* you may begin to doubt whether indeed He ever died for you or ever rose, you may treat His word with irreverence, with suspicion, or with contempt: BUT He that sitteth in the heavens is above your reach—His foolishness is wiser than your wisdom, and His weakness stronger than your strength—He will be when you are forgotten, He will still reign when you are dust. And then, at last, the sign of the Son of God shall be seen in heaven, and the light of His presence, shining from the one end of the earth even to the other, shining into the graves of the righteous and into the graves of the wicked, shall be the answer, decisive and final, alike to the misgivings of doubt and to the gainsayings of unbelief. God grant to each one of us who are now present before Him, that we may so humble ourselves before His truth while the day of grace lasts, that we may see Him with joy and not with grief when He exchanges the throne of mercy for the throne of judgment! *O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.*

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,

September 1, 1861.

SERMON XVIII.¹

THE FALL AND THE RISING.

ST LUKE XXII. 61, 62.

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

SUCH, my brethren, is the after-taste of sin. Such is the awakening from that sleep of the soul, to which the tempter has successfully presented one of his bright seductive visions. I wish you to ponder with me this evening an example of the process of temptation, as it has been witnessed ten thousand times in every generation since the fall of man. We shall have to notice three things: the sleep, the dream, and the awakening: or, to speak more plainly, the state of the soul before the sin, during the sin, and after the sin: the condition of which the tempter avails himself, the mode of his operation, and the condition in which he leaves us. God grant, not only that the subject may be (as I am sure it

¹ Preached on the Sunday before the Races.

is) seasonable; but also that our consideration of it may be serious, earnest, and profitable to many!

1. What I have called the sleep of the soul, or its condition before the sin, may be briefly described as a state of security. Not of safety, but of security; that is, of supposed safety, of imagined strength. When our Lord, at the last Supper, so mercifully warned His disciples of the approach of danger, it was Peter, you remember, who repelled the warning by an eager assertion of his own resolution and constancy. Take the account of what passed from the Gospel now before us. We have to look but a few verses back from the text itself. In the 31st verse we read: *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, or, more exactly, Satan begged for you, demanded you, that he might sift (winnow) you as wheat.* Observe, the pronoun *you* here, as elsewhere in Scripture, is plural: it includes all the disciples: then it turns to the singular. *But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith might not fail: and, when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.* The words are a little more precise: *and thou at some time having turned, or, and thou having at length turned, strengthen thy brethren.* These words, coming from their Lord Himself at so solemn a crisis, ought surely to have startled the disciples; and especially that disciple to whom they were addressed. Only consider for a moment what was contained in them. Was not their purport plainly this? "A great danger is before you. It is as if Satan himself, the great enemy of souls, whose work it is to ruin men, and whose joy it is when he can succeed in doing so, had asked God for you; had begged you of

God; had made a special request that your souls might be put into his hand for a season, even as the body of one of God's servants in old time, the patriarch Job, was consigned to him, when *the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.* The object of Satan, in making that request, was to sift the very heart and soul of that good man. He wanted to show that Job's obedience was all self-interest. *Doth Job, he said, fear God for nought? Hast not Thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face.* And then, afterwards, when the loss of all that he had, and of all that he loved, had failed to produce this effect, Satan said again, *Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face.* Thus he desired to have him that he might sift him as wheat; that he might probe every secret of his soul, every principle of his life, and bring to light his real unsoundness, his deep hidden falseness and worthlessness. Even so it is now. Satan would fain try his whole power, by God's permission, upon you. He will do so. But for one of you, in particular, I have made an earnest prayer to my Father in heaven. I have prayed that his faith may not fail, may not utterly vanish and disappear, in that fearful encounter. If it must fail for the time, yet may there be a reawakening and a recovery, a conversion and a turning back to God. And when this, in answer

to my prayer, is so, let him make it thenceforth his life's work to strengthen his brethren; to feel for their dangers from the experience of his own, and to strive by word and act to keep them in their integrity and in their stedfastness." My brethren, if our Saviour had addressed these remarkable words to any one of us, might we not have expected that we should hear them at least with alarm? What then was Peter's answer? It is given in the 33rd verse: *And he said unto Him, Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death.* He spoke earnestly, but he scarcely spoke humbly. He knew that he had love, and he knew that he had zeal, and he thought those two things must suffice for constancy. He made no allowance for altered circumstances. He remembered not how differently things appear in prospect, while they are at a distance, and in experience, when they are close upon us. And, therefore, however sincerely—and he was entirely sincere—he yet spoke ignorantly, rashly, in that spirit of self-confidence which is always utter weakness. And our Lord answered yet once more, and said to him, *I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.* Peter was silenced, but he was not convinced. His Master had spoken plainly, but he still thought that he knew better.

My brethren, the same sort of security, of self-reliance, of false confidence, is our chief bane also. Even Christian people are liable to it. Even persons who call themselves miserable sinners, and say in their prayers, as we all said last Sunday, *The frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall*, are exposed to the same

peril: the peril of self-confidence, of relying upon their own good intentions, good resolutions, or good principles, and of forgetting the solemn charge given to us all by our Master Himself, *Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

2. We turn now to the temptation and to the sin. We have seen the condition of him who is about to enter into temptation: now let us mark the sort of disguise under which the offence comes. The disciple had already had a warning of the truth of his Master's words. He had not found it quite so easy as he had expected, to be firm and resolute. True, in the first excitement of the apprehension, he had used the sword but too readily: he had struck a hasty blow, and, but for Christ's instant interposition, might have brought upon Him the reproach of resisting force by force. Immediately afterwards, Peter, like the rest of the disciples, forsook Him and fled. This surely might have taught him wisdom. This surely might have shown him that he was not so bold or so constant as he had thought himself. But no: worse was to follow. At a distance, a long and timid distance, he had followed the band which led Jesus away. And now he has cautiously entered the high priest's palace, and seated himself there at the fire among the servants *to see the end.* He thought himself unknown and unnoticed, and hoped thus to combine the two objects, interest in his Master's fate, and freedom from personal risk of sharing it. He was mistaken. A certain maid—St Mark says, one of the maidservants of the high priest—saw Peter warming himself at the fire, and, after attentively observing him, said, *This man was*

also with Him; or, *Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.* The temptation came, as usual, suddenly; and the first impulse was that of self-preservation. *He denied Him*—denied his loved Master and Lord—*saying, Woman, I know Him not.* How sad, how shameful, yet, alas, also how natural! Even this fall did not awaken conscience effectually. He moved his position; left the hall, and went out into the entrance; it might be, to escape further questioning. But the temptation was not ended. *After a little while another saw him, and said, Thou also art of them;* thou too belongest to the company of this man's disciples. Again Peter answered, *Man, I am not; denied,* St Matthew says, *with an oath,* saying, *I do not know the man.* Space was now given him for reflection. An hour passed, and he may have thought that now, however shamefully, his trial was ended. But *about the space of one hour after, another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with Him: for he is a Galilean.* And Peter said, *Man, I know not what thou sayest.* Or, as it is expressed still more strongly in other Gospels, *Then began he to curse and to swear, I know not the man.*

Temptations, my brethren, are very various. We know that sometimes they assail us, like the first temptation of all, through the body, through some appetite or passion to which we are all liable, and which carries us along, as if tied and bound, to its gratification. But the narrative before us not only represents the sudden and unexpected manner in which all temptation assails us, but shows us as in a glass the likeness and the very image of a whole class of temptations to which we are all

exposed; those, namely, which derive their power from our sensitiveness to the opinion of others; from our dislike of being singular; from our desire to stand well with our neighbours, both in what we do, and in what we do not. We speak of *the world* as one of the Christian's three enemies; and this is just what we mean, or ought to mean, by it. The world, which, as Christians, is one of our three enemies, does not mean always the great world, the world of high fashion or of unapproachable rank: it means our world: it means the men and the women who surround and who influence us: it is a very practical thing; and for this reason; because it varies with station and circumstance: the poor man has a world, which is his enemy, just as much as the rich and the great have a still more glittering and powerful world, which is their enemy. O how many of us, my brethren, are slaves of their world, be it what it may—the world of the rich man, or the world of the poor man! Which of us dares—yes, I ask the question of many men not destitute of firmness and courage in a bodily sense; of men who would stand out boldly against the attack of a robber, or repel with spirit the accusation of a slanderer—which of us, I repeat the question, dares to do exactly what he thinks right, without regard to what other men will say of it? Peter, an Apostle, a warmhearted, loving, earnest man, a man who afterwards gave his body bravely to the agonies of the cross, yet, at the time now spoken of, allowed himself to deny Christ rather than be laughed at by a few servants. O what a picture of human nature in all times! What a picture, my brethren, of us, in our little timidities about the

world's opinion! Peter's world at that moment was the high priest's kitchen: it looked as large, to him, for the time, and as important, as the king's court has looked to men of rank and fashion: the world was his enemy, and the question, *Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?* put by a maidservant, was enough to make havoc in him of every resolution and of every principle. May God write the lesson deeply upon our hearts! The essence of the warning lies in this: that we are always exposed to a very peculiar risk of denying Christ, that is, of disclaiming our connection with Him, of saying, or acting as if we said, *He is not my Master, and I am not His servant*, for the sake of avoiding a moment's ridicule or a moment's reproach: and that this is a temptation; this is a solicitation of the devil; this is what brings us under the operation of that solemn sentence of our Lord Himself, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy Angels.*

3. In the case before us, the prayer of Jesus, though it prevented not the fall, yet secured the rising. *When thou art converted*, is said of one who shall first have wandered. The faith shall fail, but not utterly, and not finally. Scarcely had Peter uttered the third denial, with all its sad and grievous aggravations, than that sound was heard, which his Lord's prediction had connected with the sin—*immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew*—and, at the same moment, his Lord, standing before His judges, exposed to every sort of insult and mockery, yet retaining amidst His sufferings the same

care for His disciples which He had ever manifested, *the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter*. Not a word was spoken, or could have been heard amidst the uproar then ringing through the palace: but no word was needed: that look, such as we can picture it—full of sorrow, full of pity, full of tenderness—recalled the sinner instantly to himself, and brought after it such a flood of grief, of self-reproach, and of misery, that he could hide his feeling no longer, but straightway *went out, and wept bitterly*. There, in that anguish, he is left by the Evangelists, until they have to tell how, on the morning of the resurrection, he was one of the first to run to the sepulchre; one of the first to whom Jesus showed Himself risen: and how he who had so lately thrice denied, was invited by his forgiving Master thrice to declare that he loved Him, and invested afresh, and in express terms, with that apostolic commission which he might seem for ever to have forfeited.

If any of us, my brethren, have ever, like St Peter, been led to deny Christ; if we have ever been induced, by fear or affection, to say of Him, in our conduct at least, *I know Him not, I am none of His*; may we, like St Peter, bitterly lament such cowardice and such ingratitude, and hasten back to Him with tears of penitence and earnest prayers for His forgiveness. To some, no doubt, a terrible fall has been salutary, yes, saving. Some can look back upon an act of sin, revealing to them their own weakness, and convincing them of their need of a Divine Saviour and Sanctifier as the very turning-point of a life. Happy are they of whom this is true! But O, for one of these, how many thousands

have found their first yielding the very *letting out of water*—the commencement of a course and life of sin, from which they have never afterwards been emancipated to this day! And therefore, while we would thank God for the encouragement given us in St Peter's bitter tears and in his restored acceptance and apostleship, we have need to lay well to heart the lessons taught us by his shameful fall.

You can imagine why this subject should have come into my heart for the present time. I can have no secrets with you, my brethren; no reserves, and no evasions. Your ministers could not possibly ignore the excitement which this coming week must bring with it. And you yourselves would be the first to despise them, if, being conscious of the fact, they did not dare to mention it.

It is a great pity, and, I think, a great error, when the whole of religion is practically made to turn upon abstinence from one or two particular amusements. Such statements you will not hear from this place. But there are certain things which a minister of the Gospel, if he would be faithful to his trust, is bound to say, and which his hearers, if they are true-hearted and honest men, will not only bear with, but respect. I shall close my Sermon with two or three words, as I hope and believe, of this nature.

i. There is a right and a wrong in all things. Whatever it is in your own power to do or not to do, it is your business to judge whether you ought to do or to forego. And, if you cannot decide this question, in a particular case, for yourself, you are bound to ask

advice upon it from older or wiser or more experienced men.

ii. The duty of all persons under authority is absolute obedience. Children are commanded in all things to obey their parents, and servants their masters. What they bid you do (if not directly contrary to God's law) becomes on that very account your clear duty, and to disobey them is to disobey God.

iii. A thing which is wrong in itself must always be wrong for you : but even a thing which is not wrong in itself may be wrong for you. If by a particular act of yours you should wound the conscience or hinder the well-doing of another, then it is your duty to abstain from that act, not for your own conscience sake, but for the sake of the conscience of that other. This is the Gospel rule, as laid down for us briefly by our Lord, and explained more at large by His holy Apostle St Paul.

iv. The Gospel of Jesus Christ allows no Saturnalia. It does not permit one week, or one day, in the year, to be regarded as a time of licence. Whatever Christian duty is, whatever Christian obligation is, whatever religion is, whatever holiness is, at one season, that it is at another and at all seasons. Some men say, I cannot expect this week to be like a common week. It is a very peculiar, a very unusual week. The whole place is transfigured. Everything is in a whirl and in an uproar. Every one is beside himself. God Himself, under these circumstances, will make some allowances. A little more levity than usual, a little more frivolity, a little more indulgence, than usual—nay, some little concession, if it should be so, to sinful practices, to carnal

lusts—is only natural, is quite venial, in a week like this. My brethren, that is not the language of the Gospel. And why not? Because the Gospel, because He who gave, because He who brought, because He who died for, the Gospel, loves us too well to speak thus to us. That language, about a time when it is not necessary and not possible to be good, is the language, not of God who loves, but of the devil who hates you. It is the language of an enemy, wanting to throw you off your guard and then to destroy you. It may be more difficult at one time than another—it is always difficult enough—to be what we ought to be: but never say that it is unnecessary, and never say that it is impossible. *With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.*

v. In the next place, and for the same reason, we must say this: Whatever you find by experience to be bad for you, injurious to you personally with reference to your religious state, that you must avoid, that you must flee from, that you must give up, at any cost. We do not say what this thing, or these things, may be in your case. But, though we do not prescribe, you can judge. Is there any amusement, is there any society, which does harm to your soul? which makes prayer more difficult, the Bible more distasteful, heaven more distant to you? Then that amusement, then that society, you are bound to give up. I say again, we judge not for you: *I speak as to wise men: judge ye what I say.*

vi. Once more: there may be difficulties, there may be temptations, which, with all your wish to do right, you cannot get rid of. Through no fault of yours, this

coming week may be a time of difficulty and of trial to your faith and constancy. Then I would urge you to a more diligent use than ever of God's appointed means of grace. Shall you find it unusually difficult to maintain a serious and a Christian mind? Shall you be more than commonly pressed and burdened by the cares and interruptions of life? Will temper be especially irritated, and tranquillity of mind ruffled? Then take heed lest, in proportion as your dangers increase, your safeguards be diminished. Take heed lest, as is so often the case at such times, you be tempted to abridge your prayers, to intermit your reading of Scripture, to seek or to make for yourself no quiet moments for thought and meditation, when each one of these things will be so peculiarly, so more than commonly, needful for you. Many a man, I doubt not, and many a woman, has been able to trace back a decided and a fatal declension from good, to a week of special excitement like that which begins to-day. God give us all grace to escape that dreadful experience!

vii. Finally, my beloved brethren, I would say to each one of you, Remember the end. When next Sunday comes, for those of us who are spared to see it, this week, with its trials and its interests, will be ended. Nothing will then remain but the recollection. O let not that retrospect be bitter and condemning! Do not have to confess then that the demon of gambling, or the demon of drunkenness, or the demon of lust, has made havoc of soul and body during these six days which follow! God forbid! But, that it may not be so, you must indeed, more than ever, watch and pray during them. The spirit may be willing: to-day you may be

saying with Peter, *Though all men should deny Thee, yet will not I.* But the flesh is weak. Even Peter, with all his zeal and with all his love, first vowed, and then fell. God keep each one of us from that presumption, and from that fall! But O, *if you fall, God grant you—for it is indeed His gift only—the grace of that recovery!*

May He be so with us, that, in all humility and in all patience, in all earnestness and in all love, we may bear each one his own burden, and every one that of others also! May He establish us and keep us from evil! May He, according to the words heard already in this evening's service, may He, the God of peace, beat down Satan under all our feet shortly!

I shall end with a few words, not of man's but of Christ's; of Him who is our Saviour, of Him who shall one day come to be our Judge. You have heard them already in this day's service.

Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,

September 15, 1861.

SERMON XIX.¹

USE AND ABUSE OF THE WORLD.

I CORINTHIANS VII. 31.

And they that use this world, as not abusing it.

A HUMAN writer is never more honoured than by having one of his expressions adopted as a national proverb. We may almost measure the genius of a great orator or a great poet, by the number of proverbs which he has furnished for popular use. It always implies that a man has had a deep insight into human nature, a large share of human feeling, and a singular force alike of thought and of expression, if he is permitted, in this sense, to live after death, alike in the orations of the eloquent and in the household talk of the simple.

There is one Book which has furnished more of these popular proverbs than any other in the world: and that Book is the Bible. Sometimes it is quoted from irreverently: ludicrous turns are given to its serious sayings, and associations thus formed in the mind, which

¹ Preached on the Sunday after the Races.

can never afterwards be broken. But, even where it is least meant, a tribute is thus paid to God's Word—to its force, to its insight, to its experience, and to its wisdom—for which we must not be unthankful. If the Bible were quite the old-fashioned, obsolete, childish fable which scoffers would fain make it, they would not turn to it even to point their sarcasms or to wing their jests. And sensible men, even when not religious, are deeply conscious of the wisdom of God's Word, and use its brief sayings with respect at least, if not with reverence, and if not with love.

One of these Bible proverbs is contained in the text. It occurs in the midst of a chapter not often perhaps read by choice. It is one advantage of our Church Service, that, with reference to the New Testament at least, there is no picking and choosing of passages for public instruction. If we except the Revelation of St John—and I am sorry that we should have to except it—the whole of the New Testament is read through in regular order, where there is a daily service, three times in each year. And where there is only a Sunday service, each chapter still has its equal chance with others, and each is heard by every worshipper many times over in the course even of a brief life. And where is that chapter, however little popular be its subject, or however little attractive its general aspect, which does not contain within it some points of beauty and of interest; some passage, embedded perhaps in paragraphs of secondary importance, yet full itself, when brought to

the light, of wise counsel, of touching pathos, or of sweet persuasion? It is thus with the words before us.

St Paul has said, in the verses immediately preceding the text, that, in such times of sorrow as he sees impending, he knows not how to recommend the formation of the ties of married life. He speaks, as he carefully reminds his readers, not by commandment, not as conveying a Divine precept, but in the way of advice, by his own judgment, and from a regard to the comfort of those whom he addresses. There is no sin, he says, in marrying and giving in marriage: only *such persons*, those who form such ties, *will have trouble in the flesh*, will have an increased amount of care, anxiety, and distress, *and* [not, but] *I spare you*: that is, I would fain spare you, my beloved friends, from that increase of sorrow. *But this I say, brethren*—this is what I say—this is the meaning of my words of warning—*the time is short*: more exactly, *the season*, that definite and destined period which yet remains to us of life before the end come, *the season is contracted: it remaineth, that both they who have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use the world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away. And I would have you without carefulness*: I would fain see you as free from unnecessary anxiety, arising out of the circumstances of life, as is compatible with the condition of persons living upon this earth.

And they that use the world, as not abusing it. The word properly expresses not so much an altogether wrong use, but rather a greedy, an engrossing, and an excessive use. To "abuse" is, properly, and in its strict meaning, to "use up." It is not, necessarily, to use for a wrong purpose; to turn that which was meant for one use to another use: it is only, to use up, to use to the full, to use a thing so as to exhaust and to consume it. They who use the world ought not to use it to the uttermost; ought not to use it with too much of eagerness, too much of absorption in it, too much of addiction to it. That is the exact meaning of the word here rendered "abusing." And, so understood, does not the brief charge thus given convey a salutary and a timely caution to us all who are here assembled?

In endeavouring, by God's help, to press it upon your attention to-night, I will avail myself of the illustrations furnished in the context by St Paul himself, and ask you to notice its application to the three subjects, of the connections of life, the circumstances of life, and the possessions of life. In all these, there is a "use" which is right, and there is an "abuse," that is, an inordinate use, which is not right but wrong. Let those who use this world, as all must use it, take heed that they abuse it not.

1. The connections of life. St Paul says, *Let those who have wives be as though they had none.* And the principle is of wide application. Let those who have husbands, let those who have parents, let those who have children, let those who have brothers or

sisters, let those who have relations and friends, be as though they had none. Let those who use be all as not abusing. And in what sense? Is there no tie, no close, endearing tie, no tie of duty as well as of affection, in all these things? Is the meaning of the Apostle that which would contradict the plainest rules of Scripture and of morality, Regard these ties as if they were not binding, as if they were nothing for you? We need not answer that question. The tie of relationship was in St Paul's eyes one of sacred obligation: he has enforced it in many of his Epistles. The tie of marriage was in his eyes so solemn and so indissoluble that on that very account he here urges men to hesitate before they form it in times of peril and of distress. Evidently his meaning is, Use, but abuse not. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord... Fathers, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord... Wives, obey your husbands in all things... Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.* But remember in each case—rather to cement than to loosen each one of these ties—remember, and forget not, that the time is short. Hold not with too tenacious a grasp that which must soon be dissolved, by death, or by the Advent. Set not your highest affections on any one of these things. See that, however much you love one another, you love Christ, and love God, more. Take heed lest you so love any earthly person as to set the will of that person above the will of God, or aim at pleasing that person more than you aim at pleasing God. The time must soon come—soon, at the latest—when

that tie will be broken; broken, never again to be re-formed on the same model: for in heaven, among the Angels of God, there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, and they who shall be counted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, must have learned here below the secret of that supreme and of that subordinate affection—the one towards God, and the other towards His creature—which alone can flourish or exist in heaven. Live now, St Paul says, in the recollection that the time is short. Let that thought arouse you to the discharge of every duty one towards another, as those who know that soon the very power to discharge that duty will be for ever lost and gone. Defer nothing that ought to be done, and allow yourself in nothing which one day you will wish undone. Let the words, *while we have time*, ring in your ears, and make you prompt for duty and intolerant of your own unfaithfulness. Soon will the husband be following his wife to the grave, and the son his mother: let no bitter thoughts of half-fulfilled or unfulfilled relations aggravate the sadness of that parting, or leave behind a deadly sting for the years of orphanage or of widowhood. *Let those that have wives be as though they had none*, not only in the subjugation of all idolatrous affections, but also in the faithful preparation for that time when every connection of life will be broken, and when for the fulfilment of every relative duty they will have to give account. *Use this world, as not abusing it.*

2. Again, in reference to the circumstances of

life. St Paul says, *Let them that weep be as though they wept not, and those who rejoice as though they rejoiced not.* Joy and sorrow, elation and depression, sunshine and storm, the time to laugh and the time to weep, all are to be as if they were not. The Gospel does not say, It is wrong to weep, or, it is wrong to rejoice. The Gospel does not encourage that dead level of human feeling, which never rises into enjoyment and never sinks into sadness. It only says, When you rejoice, let it be as though you did not rejoice; and, when you weep, let it be with you as though you wept not. Use the circumstances of life as not abusing them. That is, use them not with an eager, a grasping, an absorbed and engrossed mind. In joy, remember sorrow: in sorrow, think of joy. Remember in either case that the time is short. Never let the joys of earth, and never let the sorrows of earth—for either is possible—shut out or shut up your heaven. Never let a season of unusual enjoyment make you say to yourself, Now I shall never be cast down; now I have made my nest in the rock, and it shall never be invaded again, and never despoiled again, for ever. And never let a time of calamity make you say to yourself, All is over with me: God hath forgotten to be gracious: nothing can reverse this black picture, nothing can people again this waste, this howling wilderness. These feelings are both alike exaggerations. If life be prolonged, you who are now mourning will be again comforted, and yet again mourning, many times over, before your great change come. If life be prolonged, you who are now

prosperous will be again mourning, and yet again prosperous, many times over, before you go hence and are no more seen. Therefore let the light and the shade be duly commingled in your feeling, as assuredly they will ever be in your lot. Let the sun that is hidden shine still in your memory and in your hope: let the sun that is brightly shining be tempered by the knowledge that it must yet go down. In these things lies a great part of the discipline of life. It is in these alternations of joy and sorrow that God teaches man his chief lessons: and out of them grows for His children, in length of years, that calm and quiet spirit which is in His sight of great price. They have not ceased to rejoice, and they have not ceased to weep: but they have learned to do each even as though it were the other; to rejoice with a remembrance of weeping, and to weep with an anticipation of joy. Happy they who have so learned this lesson, that now, when sorrow comes, they can receive it as God's messenger; receive it with humility, receive it with composure, receive it without agitation and without murmuring; and, when joy, can see in it also a memento of that loving care which provides for the pilgrim refreshments to strengthen him for conflict, and refreshments to recruit him after conflict! Sorrow, as well as joy, has its extravagances and its excesses. Even sorrow may be nursed into a sin. It ought to be sobering, but it is often made enfeebling. It ought to remind us of sin, but it ought not to leave us in despondency: it ought to solemnize earth, but it ought not to obliterate heaven. *Let them that weep be as though they wept not, and them that rejoice as*

though they rejoiced not. In this sense also, we must use the world as not abusing it.

3. Once more, and most obviously, the rule has an application to the possessions of life. And this in all degrees. All men have something: and all men, certainly all working men, whether high or low, are ever gaining something. For all these therefore it is written, *Let those who buy be as though they possessed not.* And well may it be thus written. How often have we seen men run into the error thus corrected! How often have we seen them buy as if they did possess, as if they were sure of enjoying! Sometimes a man has set his heart, all through life, upon one particular possession; some house or some land which his ancestors once owned, which his father lost, and which he has set himself to recover. Or, if not this; if this higher and tenderer motive has been wanting; still the object has been the same: a man has determined to gain this position or that, and to make himself, before he dies, great or rich or famous. And some men have done this successfully; and, viewed only from earth, have gained that standing-place which others might envy. And O how safe have they thought themselves! how have they forgotten God in His gifts! how have they said, like the men in the Parable, *I pray thee have me excused,* to every call and every invitation of the Gospel! how have they said within their hearts, like the rich man in another Parable, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry!* At last the stroke has fallen: God has said at length,

This night thy soul shall be required of thee: and the whole fabric of human possession has fallen at once in ruins around them. This it is, to buy as if to possess. O what need have we all, with reference to small gains or greater, with reference to the little daily comforts which cheer the humblest home, to bear well in mind the inspired words, *And they that buy, as though they possessed not!* O what disappointments attend all human getting! How often is the thing got most unlike the thing sought, and the thing possessed most unlike the thing got! How do we deceive ourselves beforehand as to the thing which will make us happy! How often, when attained, is it found to be a mere shadow! How often, just when attained, and found to be something, is it snatched from us by an unexpected reverse, by a failure of health, or by the hand of death itself, and the whole of life has been a dream! There is no safety, and there is no happiness, for any man, but in living just for the day, thanking God for what he has, and fully prepared at any moment for its withdrawal.

Use this world, the Apostle says, *as not abusing it.* God has given us in it much to enjoy. He has given us many common, and He has given us many special blessings. To live at all in this beautiful world, with all its treasures of sight and sound, its things good for food and pleasant to the eyes, its comforts for the body and its means of information and improvement for the mind—this is enough, this ought to be enough, for any man, both to satisfy desire and to awaken gratitude. Let us not abuse the gift. Let us not

use this world greedily; giving ourselves to its enjoyments in excess, intemperately, or sinfully. Let us not use it selfishly; catching all for ourselves, and thinking nothing of the wants, in soul and body, of those around us. Let us not use it unthankfully; seizing the gifts, and forgetting the Giver. Let us not use it blindly; having all our attention fixed on the near, the present object, and losing sight altogether of the higher and better, the enduring and the heavenly. In all these ways we may use or we may abuse the world.

Thoughts such as these, my brethren, common in themselves and obvious, could not but be strongly impressed upon Christian people by the events of the week just ended. Amidst the noisy and exciting scenes which have affected, in one way or another, our whole population, and from which it is too much to hope that no evil consequences will have resulted to any lives and souls, there is just one thing which has not altogether stood still: the course of sickness has not been arrested: the hand of death has not been stayed. I know nothing more impressive, more painfully impressive, than the contrast, at such times, between the street and the chamber of sickness. It is not the sight of health which is shocking to one ministering to sickness; not the sight of health, not the sight of activity, not the sight of childish play or of manly relaxation; *but* the sight, in any sense or in any form, of sin. The sight of the drunkard, the hearing of the profane oath, the loud laughter of the abandoned woman driving shamelessly through our streets—these are the things which make a thoughtful man sick at heart, as they

force upon his notice the bitter contrast, on God's earth, between sin in its triumph and that suffering which is its curse.

It happened to me, on one of those days of thronging crowds and abounding excitements, to visit the deathbed of a Christian man, known by name and sight to most of you, and now closing a long life of integrity, of industry, of honour, and of piety, by a death full of immortality. There he lay in his still tranquil chamber; and not a sound from the noisy neighbouring town could reach him through the open window which admitted in all their sweetness the bright cheering light and the fresh fragrant air of heaven. There he lay, calm, cheerful, thankful, loving; his work finished, his race run, his rest at hand. What a picture of *the righteous man entering into peace; resting in his bed*, as the same Prophet writes, still *walking in his uprightness*; yet trusting, not in himself or in his own blamelessness, piety, or charity, but only in the merits of his Lord and Saviour, whose name, even in moments of wandering and unconsciousness, was still and ever upon his lips! O, to return from that chamber of peace and blessedness, through quiet lanes and amidst the gathered fruits of an abundant harvest, to meet again, at the very entrance of our town, those who are dishonouring God by profaneness, by drunkenness, by temptation of others; to see the Saviour Himself crucified afresh here, as He is glorified and honoured there; this indeed is a sad and painful contrast, awakening anxious thought and summoning to deep contrition!

Which of all us, my brethren, if spared, like that dying man, to the age of fourscore years, will have (to judge by the present) his retrospect of earthly life? first the discharge of every duty towards a father and a widowed mother: then a long and patient struggle with life's difficulties; those difficulties bravely encountered, and God remembered and honoured amidst all: then the promise well fulfilled, *Them that honour me I will honour*: and lastly, an old age spent in the firm yet humble maintenance of every Christian principle, and in efforts, as opportunity was given, for the spread of God's Word and of Christ's Gospel? O, my brethren, such a deathbed is not an isolated, separate, sudden thing: it is the result of such a life: and O suffer me to ask each one of you, Are you so living as to have any reasonable expectation of such a death? It comes of so using the world, as not abusing it: it comes of walking with God, of bearing the cross bravely, of living the life that now is by faith in Christ Jesus.

He of whom I have thus spoken belonged not outwardly in life to our communion: but such a man is not of a sect, he is of the Church of Christ; the Church, one and indivisible, now militant, soon to be triumphant. Such faith and such love are given to be our example. We, call ourselves what we may, need them for our own salvation: O have we found them? Little will it avail us, in the great reawakening, to have worshipped in the most beautiful of churches, to have used the most perfect of liturgies, or to have held and professed the most orthodox of creeds, unless we have also possessed that Spirit of Christ which is limited within no one com-

munion, but works in the hearts of all those who seek the Lord Jesus Christ with earnestness and love Him in sincerity.

And if in some respects we can see blemishes—blemishes, as we venture to think, of an obvious and a serious kind—in the particular body of Christians of which he was one ; yet let us confess, on the other hand, that to some Christian principles that body has sought to bear a bold and a consistent testimony : they have aimed in some points at a literal obedience, where others have been contented to follow more vaguely or more distantly : they have reprovèd the multiplication of needless and useless oaths : they have remonstrated against the wanton perpetuation of war : they have set an example of moderation and truthfulness of speech : above all, they have strongly maintained the need of a spiritual life and the reality of a spiritual presence, and have been able, in many instances, to say, not as the confession only of a true doctrine, but as the expression of a living faith, *I believe in the Holy Ghost !*

For these things we would thank them : for these things, so far as they have been consistently held, we would glorify God in them. Even from what we deem their excess of literalness, even from what we count their needless and unwise singularity, we can yet learn a lesson of self-humiliation, or self-correction, and of self-reproof. Most of all, when we see, in one of a communion not our own, such manifest tokens of a renewed heart and a devoted life, we can give thanks, beside his deathbed or his open grave, for the

approach of that promised day when Christ shall gather together in one all the children of God who are here scattered abroad, and enable us to comprehend, with a clearness now impossible, what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

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